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MADAME DE STAËL

BY

ALBERT SOREL

OF THE INSTITUTE

TRANSLATED BY

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TRANSLATOR OF "RUSSIA: ITS PEOPLE AND ITS LITERATURE"

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MADAME DE STAËL.

CHAPTER I.

YOUTH. — CHARACTER. — FIRST WRITINGS AND FIRST APPEARANCE BEFORE THE WORLD.

1766–1789.

ONE who knew MADAME DE STAËL intimately and was thus enabled to gather at first hand the incidents of her life, namely, Madame Necker de Saussure, has said: "Her works are, so to speak, in an abstract form the memoirs of her life." Madame de Staël herself said as much: "When one writes to satisfy the inspiration that possesses the soul, one's writings will involuntarily reveal every shade of one's manner of living and thinking." Thus I propose seeking the inspiration of Madame de Staël's works by studying the events of her life.

Our earliest impressions of the external world become, unconsciously to us, the prism by which everything is afterward colored.

With Chateaubriand, it was the gloomy solitudes of Combourg, the heavy mists skirting the ocean and bounded only by the forests through which the storm-winds whistled. With Lamartine, it was the hills of Milly, a country home with quiet neighboring paths, a soft and filmy sky, a dim and fleeting horizon, a pious childhood at a Christian mother's knee. With Madame de Staël, it was in private life the scenes of a happy home, and in public those of a *salon* which was the meeting-place of the best intellects of the time, — where jest and inspiration followed each in turn; where all literary questions and all the problems of the universe were discussed, and where, as a contemporary has remarked, they discoursed endlessly upon "the great truths of Nature, the immortality of the soul, the love of liberty, and the charms and dangers of the passions." A house like her parents' was always her ideal of home; happiness in marriage was her Utopia, and to reign over a *salon* was the ambition of her life.

M. Necker came of a family of Irish origin, which turning Protestant removed first to Germany and then to Geneva, though through his mother he was allied to the French proscripts of Louis XIV. He was born a citizen of the Swiss Republic. On reaching manhood, and

after a severe course of classical study, he turned his mind to the study of finance. This led him to Paris, where he entered upon his career of publicist and financier. Madame du Deffand once accused him of intermingling metaphysics with everything that he said, and it is a fact that his writings are tinged with it. But he put none of it into his bank, which was prosperous. He acquired a large fortune, and established a reputation by his eulogy of Colbert, crowned by the Academy in 1773. Necker loved popularity and aspired to power, —popularity, because he believed that the general opinion could not err; power, because he thought himself capable of accomplishing in the interest of humanity the reform of public affairs.) To his ambition he united the sincerity of a philanthropist; the gravity of a Calvinist softened by the homilies of the *Vicaire savoyard;* much kindliness in his private relations; haughtiness in his political intercourse; a mixture of tenderness for the human race and of disdain for the individual; large and systematic, though abstract views upon affairs in general; and uncertainty, rigidity, and minutiæ in action. He was not born a minister.

He had neither the force nor the judgment necessary to statecraft. He misunderstood

Richelieu, he misjudged Mirabeau, he did not comprehend Bonaparte. He had a noble heart and an estimable character, but his was not a soul of fire. The Revolution passed him by. But he achieved under the old *régime* a success surprising for a Genevese, a Protestant, a tradesman, and a plebeian, who was forced, we may say, upon the King's council by the suffrage of the most enlightened men of France, and who became popular in the most dissolute city in the world, among the people most rebellious to the commonplace virtues and the creeds of Geneva. He owed this as much to his fortune as to his merits. His bank helped him to interest in his reputation the men who at the time dispensed glory and rewards; he entertained philosophers at his table, and his *salon* was one of those which governed the French mind.

Madame Necker had her share in the laborious work of her husband's success. She was the daughter of a Protestant minister, and was filled with the instinct to good works, in the Christian sense of the word. Charity carried to excess was to her a salutary exercise. She was refreshed by it. The life of the world was always to her an artificial life; yet she loved company, she wished to love it, and made it a duty to appear a brilliant member of it. She

was at once diverted by it, bewildered, constrained, exalted, and oppressed; she was at last worn out by it. Her mind was remarkably cultivated; but the flight of her spirit was constantly trammelled by scruples upon the articles of faith. She was singularly susceptible, nervously impressionable, even passionate, in her legitimate attachments, but with a continual self-control and a sort of secret prompting to austerity. In spite of her taste for beautiful speculations of the sentimental and subtle kind, in spite of her pride of holding open house to celebrated men and of her desire to contribute to the reputation of an adored husband, she had an indescribable reserve and affectation amid a society into which she had not been born. She was a Genevese exiled among the Parisians, a Christian astray among the faithless, loving them without believing in them, listening to them without approving of them, blaming them without hoping to convert them. She suffered in the noblest qualities she possessed, — her rectitude of heart and her upright judgment. She longed for another and a purer atmosphere, that of her native mountains, but she was too enervated to endure it. She wrote to a friend: "Surely one might be and ought to be happier elsewhere than here; but then one

must never have felt the fatal charm which without giving happiness poisons forever all the other channels of life."

Such is the environment amid which Germaine Necker was born, April 22, 1766, and was brought up. She was a child of astoundingly precocious intellect and heart, and at the same time of a gay temperament. She was Necker's joy. If he kept her in a hot-house, it was in order that she might expand there. The hot-house was not enough for Madame Necker, and she attempted to add thereto an ingenious and subtle educational apparatus. It was her dream to make of her daughter a masterpiece of maternal art, knowing all things, and pious notwithstanding; of an enthusiastic imagination, yet modest in discourse and irreproachable in conduct; very pure yet at the same time very fascinating; having all the glitter of life, all the pleasures the world can give, yet without pride of life or frivolity. She wore out her soul in trying to realize this ideal. The child developed on her own part a prodigious genius which overreached all limits. She burst the mould. Madame Necker's plan of education went to increase the lumber of pedagogic Utopias. The environment carried everything before it.

From the time when Germaine could think,

she reasoned; she soared as soon as she could move. At eleven years of age she appeared at the receptions seated on a little stool at her mother's feet, wide awake but silent. The silence which she maintained during these years sufficed for the rest of her life. She listened to Raynal, Thomas, Grimm, Buffon, Morellet, and Suard, who took much notice of her, and amused themselves with watching the expressions which their discourses produced upon her mobile countenance. The theatre occupied a large place in their conversations. Marmontel and La Harpe discussed it continually, and declaimed dramatic selections. Mademoiselle Clairon was often present. Germaine profited by these lessons; she accompanied her parents to the play, and made extracts from pieces. Very soon she began to compose pieces for puppets, of which she managed the strings herself; her own conceptions of life always carried a suggestion of this. At fifteen years of age she made a *résumé* of "L'Esprit des Lois," and drew up an essay on Necker's "Compte Rendu." Raynal asked her to give him for his compilation called "Deux Indes" an article on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. She read everything she could lay hands on, preferring novels, however, and of these the most exciting. There is no saying

(at what age she fell upon Rousseau. He became her first idol.) The rape of Clarisse became one of the events of her childhood. She herself says, "Werther made an epoch in my life." Werther melted and captivated her; Lovelace dazzled, frightened, and fascinated her for a long time. "What interested her was what made her weep," reports one friend. The sight of a celebrated man made her heart beat wildly. Discerning praise of her father caused her to burst into tears. She was seventeen years old when she asked the aged Maréchale de Mouchy, "Madame, what do you think of love?" Such was the tone of her conversations and the course of her reveries. She fell ill. "She may go mad, perhaps," said Tronchin, "but she will certainly be very unhappy."

(Such was the development of her mind, which was one of the most receptive and expansive ever seen; possessed with an insatiable avidity to know everything and the capacity to take it all in; having not merely intelligence, but sympathy, a sort of divination of the thoughts of others, and an "instantaneous inspiration," or what amounted to that, in her own ideas; apprehending and inspired, moreover, not by reflection, but in a flash, or, as it were, on the wing. There was no interval

between thought and speech; the thought was born and quickened by speech itself. "Conversation was her inspiration and her muse," remarks one who best understood her and who has analyzed her most keenly. She lived in a state of perpetual expansion and improvisation.

But she lacked self-government, concentration, and patient thought. It fatigued her to apply herself to these. She advanced by great wing-strokes; never creeping over an idea, yet turning it out with rare skill. She would not take the trouble to learn anything thoroughly. She knew nothing of that spiritual discipline which produced the strong and healthy grace of a Sévigné, the natural yet grand style, the simple way of expressing herself better than any one else, the command of language renewed at its sources and always the most precise when most original. Her mind revolted against the leading strings of Port Royal; her tongue could not endure the curb of Condillac. She did not understand submission either to method or grammar. Her aspirations were always beyond her ideas; her heart, for analogous reasons, was very often far above her words and acts.

This ardent, passionate, but straightforward heart, prodigal of gifts and confidences, eager

for change, impatient of examination, and generous above all things, was also largely endowed with intelligence. "I have many faculties for happiness," said Corinne. Germaine Necker was too eager both for happiness and knowledge, and too insatiable. She stopped at no obstacles amid her outbursts of affection, either within herself or without. She took no account either of the hindrances offered by the outside world, or of contradictory sentiments, or of any of the misfortunes of life which wear and tear the passions to tatters. Indeed all her sentiments turned to passions, and all her passions to storms. ("Her devouring imagination," which grasped at everything around her, first seized upon herself; it was the lever by which she moved souls; it held complete sway over her own soul, which never knew tranquillity. Later she said, "My imagination is like the tower of Ugolin.")

(Nevertheless she had at bottom a good sense and a moral soundness which sustained her in time of tempest.) If she could not at all understand that others felt differently from herself, her own sentiments were at least sincere. This sincerity was the measure which she applied to herself most scrupulously. When the vertigo of emotion was past, she resumed her equilibrium and judged herself. Her ex-

aminations of conscience rendered her singularly perspicacious and just. These, while edifying to her, gave her little consolation. Her clear-sighted analyses were for the most part a refinement of torture. But as she was naturally kind, her self-torture heightened her sense of pity.

(We must note here, at the beginning, these singularities of her character, for her genius is born of them.) Her life was the product of her tumultuous and troubled sentiments; her writings are the result of her self-judgment and her pity. As she advanced in life and considered her existence from a higher standpoint, she drew from her own trials a higher and purer moral. Whatever failed her in her own destiny she completed in her books. It is thus that her rich and virile works are brought forth amid a career of troubles, agitations, and sometimes weaknesses.)

Happily for her and for those around her, she felt it an absolute necessity to be amused. She had a large and easy good-nature, and when her heart was not otherwise engaged, a charming freedom in all her relations.

("Corinne was very gay in spirit. She appreciated the ridiculous with the keenness of a French woman, and portrayed it with the imagination of an Italian, but she joined to it a

kindly feeling. One never saw in her anything of malice or hostility; for in every case it is coldness which offends, while, on the contrary, a lively imagination is almost always kind." And here is Delphine: "Well-chosen expressions and movements always natural, a gayety of spirit and a melancholy tinge of sentiment, excitability and simplicity, enthusiasm and energy! What an adorable mixture of spirit and candor, of sweetness and strength! Possessing to the same degree all that could inspire admiration in the profoundest thinkers, all that could set at ease the most commonplace minds, if they are kindly disposed and hope to find that same tender quality in the gentlest, noblest, most seductive and naïve forms."

It is thus she paints herself, and thus she would appear upon the theatre of the world. She can conceive neither of glory nor happiness outside that theatre. There she interests herself in everything, — sentiments, politics, art, literature, and philosophy; but to the rest of the universe she is indifferent. She has no liking for the promenade; Nature for her is dull; meditation wearies her; retirement terrifies her; solitude fills her with horror. She has her vulnerable spot, and her vampire is *ennui*. Society, which is the delight of her life, is also

its necessity. Only in Paris does she find herself at ease and comfortable.

And yet there is something in her which even there is stifled and tries to burst forth. She places the source of happiness in enthusiasm, but she seeks this happiness in a realm where all is shifting sand or barren waste. (Her character rebels against the conventionalities and prejudices of the world, as her mind rebels against scholastic methods and the common usages of language.) She aspires to reign in society, but she hopes to dispense with the first condition of such a reign; namely, etiquette, the art of mastering oneself in ruling others. Her nature repudiates not only hypocrisy and worldly strategy, but even simple discretion and that prudence which one may call the spirit of tact in conduct. She knows no longer interval between thought and action than between thought and speech. "Your character," said a friend who knew her well, "is incapable of enduring the annoyances that one provokes by the endeavor to shine in the world of society."

(This dread of dulness or of emptiness, if one may put it so, this thirst for amusement, this eagerness to shine and to please, joined to an impossibility of self-restraint, throws her into perpetual inconsistencies.) She has a vigorous

and impetuous soul, (but she manifests all a woman's weakness.) She says of Delphine: "Although the breadth of her spirit gives her independence, yet her character nevertheless needs support." Germaine was carried away by her heart and her genius, at the very start, at one bound, without regard to possibilities; afterward face to face with resistance, "her quick discernment of the true, the real, flashed a sudden illumination upon her, and at the same time pierced her like a sharp spur; the reaction was immediate; and too frequently contempt of the precaution to cover her retreat and hide her transition made her the jest of envious and malicious mediocrity." These internal strifes, says the most authoritative and most respectful of witnesses the Duc Victor de Broglie, "made her existence tempestuous; her family life passionate, ardent, and tumultuous." They at last destroyed her health, which had been unsettled by continual commotion since her earliest years.

These fundamental contrarieties of character are plainly manifested in the two objects of worship which filled Germaine's youth, — the first, which lasted to the end of her life, the beneficent worship of the domestic hearth, the home of Necker; the other a foreign idol, a cult of insidious mysteries and poisonous

perfumes, from which she detached herself by degrees, but which never entirely ceased to trouble her: I mean the worship of Rousseau. Both Necker and Rousseau talk much of virtue and promise happiness: but Necker finds happiness in virtue, and it is to this happiness that the disposition of Germaine invites her; Rousseau finds virtue in happiness, and to this sophisticated virtue Germaine is attracted by her imagination.

At the point where we now take up her history, near her twentieth year, she is still dreaming of it; but the dream which disturbs her is the same which will continue to trouble her through all the metamorphoses of life,—to be loved, as she would herself love, in an incessant ecstasy of her whole being, in a glorious felicity irradiating her whole life. At nineteen she wrote in her journal: "A woman should have nothing in herself, but should find all her joy in what she loves." At thirty she confessed to a friend: "I trusted everything to love. In youth every sentiment springs from that." At forty she makes Corinne say: "In seeking for glory I have always hoped that it would cause me to love." After Germaine had attained this glory, she perceived that without love it is but vanity, and concluded: "Glory itself can be, for a woman, only

a loud and bitter cry for happiness." Ambition, for her, could never be more than a surpassing desire to please, and a current having its source in love. But she desired the more passionately to appear brilliant as she realized her lack of beauty. She lacked — and she knew it only too well — the outward graces, those mute and ineffable charms which through the eyes find their way irresistibly to the heart.

Her admirers have portrayed her as a muse, lyre in hand. She is Clio or Melpomene, "the most notable priestess of Apollo, the favorite of the god, whose incense is to him the most agreeable of all. Her large black eyes sparkle with genius; her hair, ebon-hued, falls upon her shoulders in waving ringlets; her features are more pronounced than delicate; one perceives in her something more than the common destiny of her sex." Yes, but of this destiny one perceives no trace whatever. Take away from the portrait the mythological attributes and the allegorical background, and you shall see a person of medium stature, rather stocky, not quite deficient in grace and ease, but without that lightness and nymph-like elegance which was the ravishing type of the beauty of that day immortalized by David and Gérard in the

portraits of Juliette Récamier and Madame Regnauld de Saint-Jean d'Angely.

Neither is she Amélie, nor even Corinne; she is Dido, virgin still, but predestinated to passion. The features are expressive; the complexion dark rather than fresh, yet of a good color, which is heightened by conversation; the shoulders are well shaped, the arms powerful, the hands robust,— the hands of a sovereign and not of a great and sentimental coquette; a broad forehead; black hair falling thick and curling over her shoulders; a strong nose; a mouth forcibly designed, prominent lips opening wide for life and speech, — the mouth of an orator, with a frank and kindly smile; all her genius shines forth in her eyes, in her sparkling glances, confiding, superb, deep and sweet when in repose, imperious when lighted by a sudden flash. But to produce this flash the tripod of inspiration must be close at hand. Germaine must speak in order to charm, and must conquer in order to make herself beloved; the result is an appearance of too much eagerness in her anxiety to please, and even in her kindness. With her, ambition must serve sentiment, but sentiment borrows a degree of uneasiness and greediness from ambition. It is love, as a man conceives of it, — love which rules. She cannot be happy

unless she is ruled by the man she loves. In life she must have a guide, in love a master; yet in her life she will be the most unsubmissive, and in love the most despotic, of creatures.

"What did she find, she who never saw in the object of her choice a sublime protector, a strong and gentle guide, whose glance commands and entreats, and who receives on his knees the right to dispose of our fate?" A friend, "of the same age, beside whom you must live and die; a friend whose every interest is your own, whose every perspective is in common with yours, including that of the tomb."

Such is her ideal. It is full of difficulty and delusion. This romantic marriage she can only imagine in connection with the world she would live in, without which she could not live at all; but that world, so frivolous and malicious, is it compatible with such a worshipful admiration? What man in it could sustain that sublime character? In the presence of this woman, who would shine so as to be loved, who would be loved only by a man more brilliant than herself, love would be born of the spark struck out by their spirits; but, the flame once lighted, love would be consumed by it. Before even jealousy could

rend it, the rivalry of spirit would have wounded it incessantly.

Read "Delphine" again; it is the romance of Madame de Staël's own life. Read especially the letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, who is the realization of Delphine, and you shall see how in such hearts the enchantment works. It is at a supper-company of talkers, such as was then in vogue, that Mademoiselle de Lespinasse meets the man who is to take possession of her. In listening to him she feels herself overcome and already carried away. "Yes, you are very kind. I have just re-read your letter. It has the sweetness of Gessner added to the energy of Jean Jacques." And Delphine, after the first interview with Léonce in Madame de Vernon's *salon*, says: "I chatted a long time with him, before him, for him. . . . Every word from Léonce added to my esteem, to my admiration. His manner of speaking was concise but energetic; and when he used expressions that were full of strength and eloquence, one could perceive that he spoke even then but half his thought, and that in the bottom of his heart there still remained stores of sentiment and passion which he declined to waste. With what interest he deigned to listen to me! Nay, I cannot imagine a more delicious situation: thought stirred by the movement

of the soul, the success of self-gratification changed to the joys of the heart, — oh, what happy moments!"

Here we have the frame and the hero, and we must take account of them if we would understand what distinguishes love in the life and works of Madame de Staël, from the love of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, and George Sand. It is not beside the sounding surf, nor on the shores of the forest-girdled lake, nor upon the promontory of Armorica, nor in the desert where the noisy transports of Chactas are mingled with the noise of the storm, that Delphine and Corinne are carried away by love. The man who charms them is neither the rhetorical Saint-Preux, nor the stormy René, nor the gentle Paul, nor Sténio, Jocelyn, or Mauprat, but a man of the world, a successful man, a hero of the Academy, one of the men Lord Nelvil spoke of and admired in Paris, a man of sound learning, of superior talent, having a lively desire to please even more than to be useful, craving the applause of the *salon* as eagerly as that of the tribune, and living in the society of women for the sake of their praise rather than their love.

In 1781 Germaine met the Comte de Guibert, and her ideal was realized. She was fif-

teen, he was thirty-eight; but she was strangely precocious in intellectual concerns, and Guibert was surrounded with so bright a halo that his years scarcely told against him. She did nothing but gaze at him as he passed by, and listen to him as he talked in Madame Necker's *salon*. In the lofty carriage of his head, in his trenchant tones, in the authority gained by success, in the superb presumption of his well-preserved youth, in the somewhat artificial impetuosity of his spirit, in the very politic reserve of his conduct, there was something quite imposing which struck her fancy. She never suspected the subtle mechanism of this famous artificer of glory. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse wrote to her about this time: "You would make the happiness of a vain soul and the despair of a sensitive one. I fear that you may have to say one day, 'The thirst for glory has wearied my soul.'" Mademoiselle de Lespinasse tried it and died of it. Germaine Necker tried it in her turn when she demanded of another Guibert, younger and still more brilliant, the virtue, the tenderness, the passion, and the genius with which she had once adorned the hero of her youthful dreams.

These dreams are embodied in her first compositions. She attempted verses, but with

little success: the images did not come spontaneously to her mind; moreover she rebelled against both rhyme and rhythm. Of all the verses she has written I find none worth preserving except the following; these have a passionate and tender tone: —

"You call me your life: call me rather your soul;
I want words that will last for more than a day.
Life passes, a breath may extinguish its flame;
But the soul, like love, shall endure for aye." [1]

Of the works of this period of her life the following have been preserved: a romantic comedy called "Sophie, or Secret Sentiments," which was printed; "Jane Grey," a dramatic essay; "Montmorency," a tragedy in manuscript; three novels, namely, "Adelaide and Theodore," which is an outline of "Delphine;" "Pauline," an imitation of Clarisse; and "Mirza, or A Traveller's Letter," — "an incident founded upon some circumstances in the treatment of the negroes." These are sentimental compositions, or "sensibles," as the author is pleased to term them. Here are a few lines merely to show their tone: "'Sometimes I have been beloved,' said Mirza. 'I have

[1] "Tu m'appelles ta vie: appelles-moi ton âme;
Je veux un mot de toi qui dure plus qu'un jour.
La vie est éphémère, un souffle éteint sa flamme;
Mais l'âme est immortelle aussi bien que l'amour."

perhaps longed to be susceptible; I have longed to know this sentiment which takes hold upon one's whole life, and itself shapes the fate of every minute of the day.' But Mirza has read (and read too much), and still more has conversed and reflected. 'It has never before,' she says, 'been possible to deceive me, or for me to deceive myself.' 'Mirza,' cried Ximéo, 'how I pity you! The pleasures of thought are not enough. Only those of the heart satisfy all the faculties of the soul.'" Nothing whatever in these early attempts proclaims the great writer; but they describe a state of soul, and reveal the woman.

This is the principal and indeed the sole interest to be found to-day in the most important of these youthful works, which is entitled ("Letters upon the Writings and Character of Jean Jacques Rousseau.") It is a pretentious piece, made up of variations composed by a young *virtuosa* upon a fashionable theme for a parlor concert. The style is false, taste has changed, amateurism is out of date; but the work is a declaration, almost a programme of life. Germaine experienced the charm of Rousseau, but she was not entirely captivated by it. It was a shadow which will deepen still more with the years. It marks the line which separates Germaine Necker from the other two

literary daughters of Jean Jacques, — Madame Roland and George Sand. Madame Roland is Heloïse in the flesh; George Sand is Heloïse raised to genius; the former has all the virtue, the latter all the poetry, of Rousseau. Germaine Necker is only an enthusiastic reader and an undisciplined imitator. In fact, she regained her self-possession, and sought inspiration from Rousseau rather than procession. Her style never attained the gravity of "Le Contrat Social" or the enchanting simplicity of the "Confessions," and she appropriated nothing but the rhetoric of "Émile." To begin with, her inexorable good sense, her political inclinations, and especially the historical taste which experience developed in her, led her far away from Jean Jacques. For a complete understanding of the master she lacked the community of destiny which forms the soul-tie between him and Manon Phlipon or Aurore Dupin. The daughter of Necker had no feeling that Julie or Sophie lived again in herself; she had no inclination to declare herself *citoyenne* of the republic of the *Contrat.* His customs, his passions, his politics had no place in her world; and she twice says as much, in passing the following judgments, one of which shadows forth the future historian, while the other betrays the *femme d'esprit:* —

"Montesquieu is more useful to already established societies; Rousseau will be more useful to those that are just about to be formed."

"Julie's continual sermons to Saint-Preux are out of place: a guilty woman may love virtue, but she should not preach about it."

(The "Letters on Jean Jacques" were printed in 1788 and published in 1789.) Germaine Necker was then married, and it was under her married name that she put forth what appeared as her first work.

If ever a marriage of reason was unreasonable, it was that which the Neckers arranged for their daughter. Rarely has an affair negotiated with so many complex worldly details for the sake of the concerns of the heart been followed by sadder results.

Madame Necker desired a great match. She gave some thought to young Pitt, who came to the Continent in 1783. Unless she had married Mirabeau, much older than herself and very unpopular, or Bonaparte three years younger and still unknown, Germaine Necker could not have proposed a more extraordinary match for herself. But she already felt that anywhere outside of Paris was exile. She refused, and there ensued a stormy time in the family. "Hateful island!" she wrote in her diary, "daily source of dread,

future source of remorse!" They were obliged to fall back on a foreign minister accredited to the king; for only in the diplomatic corps could they find a man of position professing the reformed religion in France.

The lot fell to a Swede, Baron Staël Holstein; he was of Mirabeau's age, and was therefore seventeen years older than Germaine Necker. He was of good birth and breeding; a gambler, reckless, and not over-fortunate; of insinuating manners, and of a perspicacious rather than a broad mind, with a certain tendency toward mysticism which northern peoples easily accept along with a practical care for worldly interests; above all, a diplomat, and ambitious for a grand marriage which should enable him to pay his debts and present a worthy figure as an ambassador. The old Comtesse de Boufflers, who was interested in him, introduced him to Necker's good graces, and undertook to obtain the favor of the King of Sweden for the alliance. The preliminaries lasted not less than five years. Finally, Gustavus III., having obtained from France the cession of the island of Saint-Barthélemy, consented to raise his legation at Paris to the rank of an embassy, on condition that Mademoiselle Necker's dower should defray the expense. Necker demanded a guaranty that it should be a perpetual em-

bassy, and that the title of count should be bestowed upon Staël. Gustavus III. promised the perpetuity of the embassy, but withheld the rank of count. Necker consented. As for Germaine she ought to have felt greatly honored to have been the object of so pretty a diplomatic transaction. She was treated like a princess; that is to say, her opinion was never asked. (And so she became *la baronne de Staël* on the 14th of January, 1786. "All the world," wrote Catherine the Great, who took notice of everything that was going on, "declares that the daughter of M. Necker is making a very bad match, and that they are not marrying her well.")

(Everything had heretofore contributed to develop Germaine's ideal of love in marriage; but her marriage, which united so many conventionalities, excluded that entirely. This was the origin of the storms and catastrophes of her life.)

"It is from marriage," says Delphine, "that all a woman's affections should be derived; and if the marriage is unhappy, what a confusion will follow in ideas, in duties, and even in characteristics! These characteristics should have made you more worthy of the object of your choice; but they may deprave the heart that is denied all those joys, for who can then be certain of her conduct? You, Madame, because

you no longer believe in love; but I, who am still captive to its charm, — where is the madman who would care for me, would care for an enthusiastic soul which he could not make captive? . . . A woman's fate is at an end when she does not marry the one she loves; society has left but one hope in woman's destiny; when the die is cast and one has lost, all is over."

Madame de Staël had made trial of her life and passed judgment upon it when she wrote these lines. She was but twenty-two years of age, and her marriage was still very recent, when she inserted this significant passage into one of the "Letters on Jean Jacques Rousseau": "One is virtuous when one loves what one ought to love; involuntarily one does what duty commands; . . . this abandonment of self, this contempt of all that vanity would have us seek, prepares the soul for virtue."

She was not at all happy at heart; but this we know rather than perceive during the years between 1786 and 1789, though she was by turns melancholy and excited like the heroines of romance. At the beginning she was much diverted with society, and the glamour of her own youth. She was received at Versailles; she held a *salon* at the Swedish embassy, rue du Bac, which eclipsed that of

Madame Necker; she wrote lively letters to Gustavus III. about Parisian society, and paid this prince, who was very proud of his own abilities, the court which would best flatter him. She became the delight of that charming society of which one of its most ardent admirers, the young Abbé de Périgord, wrote somewhat later: "He who did not live in those years knows nothing of the pleasure of living." The world believed itself rejuvenated; it was merely intoxicated by itself. It finished like a banquet whose tapers are extinguished before the open windows by the refreshing air of a beautiful summer dawn. Germaine de Staël retained an ineffaceable impression of it: "There was never so much spirit and life anywhere else." Her whole soul went forth in hopes, and the hopes were dissipated in discourse. Only to talk well was to have genius, and never did any one talk with a sincerer illusion of enthusiasm.

"They thought in order to talk, and they talked in order to be applauded." It was the reign of the *salons*, the reign of conversation, the reign of women. Germaine de Staël is queen, — queen at Paris of the France which is to come, as Marie Antoinette is queen at Versailles of the France that is to disappear. Her eloquence burst forth, and her friends felt

the first enchantment of that marvellous improvisation which made Sismondi say after her voice was hushed, "Life for me is like a ball when the music has stopped."

She excited envy in some, and scarcely had she become celebrated when the world began to calumniate her. The malignity of her rivals in intellect joined forces with the hatred of her father's political adversaries. As the daughter of Necker and the muse of the state reformers, she roused against her all those who at the court and in Paris held on to the old abuses, and prided themselves on loyalty to the absolute monarchy. Add to this her own imprudence in speech, which she never preconsidered, being incapable of restraining a clever word or a piquant remark; her inconsistencies of conduct and her contempt of etiquette; her too decided preferences and her still less concealed coldness and disdain. She did not measure results, intending no more malice in her witticisms than hatred in her spontaneous dislikes; pursuing without transition, in society, in politics, and very soon in the Revolution, her *rôle* of the precocious and spoiled child, playing with fire, playing with monsters, never imagining that they could harm and that she in return could be scorched by the fire and torn by the claws.

"She frightened the women," Madame de Rémusat, who did not like her, said later; "she offended scores of men to whom she thought herself superior." Among these was Rivarol, who was jealous and abusive; and Senac de Meilhan who published this perfidious portrait, to which he gave the name of Hortense: "An intoxication of talents has overpowered her, and she has made enthusiasm a habit. . . . Her manners are so vehement that one is stunned; her conversation seems an assault; she is rather an unusual than an amiable woman; but whoever is beloved by her will find in Hortense a unique woman, a treasure of thought and sentiment." The world was pitiless to Marie Antoinette; it was cruel to Madame de Staël. She suffered keenly. "I know," she wrote, "of but one kind of severity formidable to sensitive souls: it is that of society people." ("To fight against opinion in the midst of society," said Delphine, "is the greatest punishment that I can imagine.")

Yet there she lived amid this malicious and hostile society exposed to all the deceits and sophisms of the passions. There was nothing to protect her from it. A vague ~~deism, the~~ ashes ~~of~~ a religion ruined ~~by the~~ sarcasm of the philosophers; a romantic morality inclin-

ing to all the casuistry of sentiment; a cold and unattractive marriage, — these were a frail defence against the assault of a corrupt and furious world; a world of Epicureans of riotous imaginations, who lived in libertinage and chafed at virtue, who discoursed upon natural right and translated it to mean intrigue, who declaimed like Jean Jacques' heroes, disturbed the peace like those of the younger Crébillon, and presumed to accomplish the renovation of the State by a political scheme derived from "Les Liaisons Dangereuses."

Among the young leaders of this generation who held a rendezvous in her *salon*, Madame de Staël selected three who were more nearly related to her than the rest in mind or heart. "The three men whom I most loved," she said afterward, "whom I loved after the age of nineteen or twenty, were Narbonne, Talleyrand, and Mathieu de Montmorency." The last should be placed first and kept apart. He seems never to play any other part than that of confidant and consoler, but a confidant of most intimate nature and a specially elected consoler, — one with his friend in enthusiasm and in community of illusions, — the only one who never troubled her life, who never exercised any but a beneficent influence upon it, and who, without captivating her

mind as much as the others, had perhaps an intellect that surpassed her genius. Mathieu, in spite of some inconsistencies, was at heart a good man and sincerely virtuous. The other two were complete *roués*. Talleyrand, under greater limitations as Abbé de Périgord, was already quite secularized in mind and manners, — not yet the classic Talleyrand of councils and congresses, wrinkled, old, tired of everything yet satisfied with nothing, but Talleyrand in his thirtieth year, young-looking, much sought after, elegant in figure, more a rogue than a sceptic, a sort of Gondi, more impregnated with Laclos than with Saint-Evremond, and who called himself Chérubin when he was at the seminary. Narbonne was a *grand seigneur*, a great charmer having the bearing and reputation of a statesman, inexhaustible in ideas and projects, animated and epigrammatic, the most dazzling of talkers, superior to Rivarol, — perhaps because he talked like a gentleman who gives his mind freely, and not like a professional; a man of the world and of the court, imposing to the men, irresistible to the women, with the double prestige of a romantic history in his past and triumphant prophecies for his future. Guibert died just then, at the right time, adroit as ever in managing his reputation as

a great man and a happy one. Madame de Staël wrote a eulogy of the hero in the funereal and emphatic manner of one of her masters, Thomas: "It was an oak overthrown by the winds; it was Nature abandoning one of her most noble works." She saw him resuscitated, rejuvenated, and more ideal, if possible, in Narbonne. She was dazzled.

The Revolution suddenly turned all of Madame de Staël's best faculties toward public affairs, and seemed to open to her a new destiny as a political woman. She put on the mask, though she had not the character. While she was the inspirer of a great party which believed itself master of France, namely, the Constitutionals, she remained still mistress of her house, and a woman passionately longing for happiness amid the general crash of things about her. She could manage politics only from her *salon;* she imagined, however, for a moment that she could make *that* the State itself. But it was never anything more than a political boudoir, — a brilliant and voiceful boudoir, but a boudoir still. The Revolution surged round about it, isolated it, and then submerged it. It could not be otherwise.

The crisis they were entering upon was not one of intellect, of eloquence, and of intrigue: it was an affair of the State, the most formidable

ever seen; and there was need, not for the vain Pompeys and Ciceros for whom Madame de Staël professed idolatry, but for the Scyllas and Cæsars for whom she felt a horror. She was too much interested in too many ideas and too many persons; she loved too well to please, to admire, to console, and to worship; she had too much justice of conscience, too much pity of heart, too much delicacy of soul; she could inspire her contemporaries, but she was not capable of leading men, of laying bare their weaknesses, or of employing their vices. She formed no plans which she would not instantly have broken for the sake of a friend. To shirk suffering seemed to her the last gasp of human activity. State reason seemed to her a blasphemy. Even the word "State" had for her a significance of harshness and tyranny against which she rebelled. It scarcely appears at all in her writings. The Government does not appear in them save as a theatrical assembly. She loved only liberty. Animated by a virile genius, she was yet too entirely a woman, by reason of her weaknesses and goodness of heart, to be politic. Politics could only be in her life a pain and deception the more.

CHAPTER II.

THE REVOLUTION. — "REFLECTIONS UPON THE PEACE." — THE "ESSAY ON FICTION."

1789–1795.

HER day came during the Revolution, — a day all her own, the memory of which appears in her writings as radiant as that of the first Federation in the national chronicles. It was the day of Necker's triumphant return after the 14th of July, 1789. She accompanied her father; she followed him amid the excited people; she was herself wildly excited. "M. Necker advanced to the balcony [of the Hôtel de Ville], and proclaimed in a loud voice the blessed words of peace between Frenchmen of all parties, while the whole multitude shouted with delight. I saw nothing more at that moment, for I swooned with joy." "Ah, what an intoxicating joy is popularity!" Necker at the Hôtel de Ville, Corinne at the Capitol, — it is under this theatrical aspect, in the apotheosis of a final act, when the curtain falls amid applause, that Madame de Staël always dreamed of glory. She would gladly have paused long at this day, — "the last day

of prosperity in my life! . . . No man ever enjoyed to such a degree the affection of the people. Alas! it was I, above all, who enjoyed it for his sake; it was I whom it intoxicated; it is I who ought not to be ungrateful for these joys." Ungrateful she certainly never was. But these joys, which took her heart and her enthusiasm by surprise, were in her life only as periods of clear weather between storms. She soon realized this; the second disgrace of Necker, his fall, this time irretrievable, his unpopularity, the oblivion to which he retired (worse than the fall itself), the quarrels between Staël and his king, which compromised the very existence of the embassy, — in fine, all the side issues of the crisis, so lightly met, too soon turned to dramatic reality.

Madame de Staël was one of the most prominent persons in Paris. She eclipsed the queen; she suffered the same reverses. Her enemies treated her in their libels and gazettes as the enemies of Marie Antoinette had treated her, and they tore her to pieces. They represented her as living amid intrigue and libertinism. "She is the Bacchante of the Revolution, . . . the only person in France who could deceive her sex," say "Les Actes des Apôtres." Rivarol dedicated to her his "Petit

Almanach des Grands Hommes," — "Madame, to publish a dictionary of the great men of the day is to offer you the list of your adorers." Just as Hébert, Marat, and Fouquier-Tinville when they wished to insult Marie Antoinette had only to rummage through the secret libraries of Versailles, the police of the Directory and of Napoleon could find in the Royalist pamphlets the repertory of the abuses which they heaped for twenty years upon Madame de Staël.

She aimed to govern the State from her *salon*. The opinions held in this *salon* were treated as affairs of State, as well as the cabals which had their rise there, and even the *bons-mots* which circulated thence. This *salon* was Madame de Staël's glory; this glory was the source of all her annoyances, griefs, and persecutions. She endeavored to soothe and to conciliate. She made the "cleverest men of opposite opinions dine together . . . they always understand one another on a certain plane." The parties do not stay very long on this plane, however. The spirit of faction ruins the spirit of politeness. Men have only to take one another seriously to beget aversion for one another. They formed parties, and each excluded the other. Madame de Staël, whether she would or no, had her own party, or rather her circle.

She was pushed into it, rather than entered it voluntarily. She had some friends who already no longer thought as she did. She admired Lafayette for his chivalrous spirit; she gladly praised Siéyès as a political emulator of Newton, "the mysterious oracle of the events that were in preparation;" she loved Narbonne, who had no liking for Necker's systems, was refractory to the Declaration of Rights, and in his views of reform went no farther than a sort of aristocratic liberty *à la* Voltaire rather than *à la* Montesquieu. Her preferences were with the group which had Lally on the right and Talleyrand on the left, and which included beside *bourgeois* like Mounier and Malouet, gentlemen like Mathieu de Montmorency, Clermont-Tonnerre, Crillon, La Rochefoucauld, Toulongeon, and the Prince de Broglie, declared partisans of the English Constitution and a mucleus ready to hand for a chamber of peers. They believed it possible to import this Constitution to France. Doubtless the king had nothing to do with it; but the history of the English offered a salutary expedient.

"It was," affirms Madame de Staël, "an idea generally established in the minds of statesmen, that a deviation from heredity might be favorable to the establishment of liberty, by placing at the head of the Constitution a king

who owed his throne to it, instead of a king who would think himself despoiled by it." Several of Madame de Staël's most intimate friends, although much divided among themselves, openly thought and expressed the same, — Narbonne, who supported the Empire; Siéyès, who brought about the Consulate; Talleyrand, who made, unmade, and remade every *régime* during half a century. They had not then given a thought to the Duke of Orleans, — he was as yet a mere subaltern in the Revolution; they considered him as "without bridle and without force," — but they did think of his son, who gave promise of a political turn of mind and a valorous heart. In case of need they would have had recourse to strangers, — to Brunswick, Henry of Prussia, or a Spanish Bourbon. Madame de Staël persisted in her views, in common with Bernadotte, until 1813. Talleyrand, the only survivor of that group, saw its secret wish fulfilled in 1830; but none of these men, in the years between 1790 and 1791, had any presentiment of the Cæsar that France was hatching, whom the Revolution would raise up and whom the most of them would have to serve.

Madame de Staël suspected it least of all. In her judgment upon the Revolution there is a fundamental misconception,— the entire source,

so far as she is concerned, of errors of conduct, disappointments, and sorrows. Of the two essential objects of the Revolution, — liberty, civil and political, and reform of society and the State, — only the second appealed to her, while the first, on the contrary, inflamed the great mass of the French people. They struck at what was most pressing and necessary, — the abolition of the seignorial *régime*, personal liberty, liberty of possessions, and equality. They gave little anxiety to the guaranty of these rights by political institutions. Madame de Staël and her friends put, if it were possible, the guaranty above the object guaranteed, the political constitution above the civil laws. They made the mistake of attributing to the whole nation the wish of an enlightened portion of French society.

The main current (*allure principal*) of the Revolution escaped them; and therefore it is that this party, distinguished as it was, never came into power. They did not understand that France, once her own mistress, would become a democracy according to her instincts, the drift of her past, and the education she owed to her kings. The Roman liberty of the conventions, the civil liberty of the consulate, the obedience of the people to the Comité de Salut Public, the popularity of Bonaparte and

his omnipotence, were to the very last inexplicable to these noble and ingenious thinkers. They followed the development of their own abstract ideas, while round about them France ran the course marked out for her in history.

Madame de Staël is credited with these words on Mirabeau: "That man who often defied public opinion, but always sustained the general opinion," — profound words; but only a witticism, even if they are authentic. At the beginning of the Revolution Mirabeau was as inscrutable to her as Bonaparte was at the end of it. She always judged Mirabeau as was natural to the daughter of Necker, the Catiline of that misunderstood Cicero. She admits that he "knew everything and foresaw everything;" but the final impression which she retains and which she gives of him, is that he is an outcast ready "to set fire to the whole social edifice, in order to force open to himself the doors of the *salons* of Paris . . . only caring to use his thunderous eloquence for the sake of getting himself into the front rank, whence his own immorality had banished him." She judges Mirabeau as Madame Roland judges Danton, but with less narrowness and partiality, because hers was the mind of the historian and ignored the spirit of faction. She makes him a political monster, hideous, cynical, hedged in with

statecraft. She suspects that he may become what she dreads most of anything in the world, — a possible successor to Richelieu.

The chiefs of the democracy are merely schemers in her eyes; democracy itself, which forces its way and oversteps the bounds already, seems to her "an impossibility in France." The national character of the event strikes her no more than the social character of the Revolution. The spirit of proselytism, of humanitarian propagandism, the spirit of extension and conquest, so Gallic and so Roman, are to her as deviations from the abstract notions of 1789. She is full of illusions about the "enlightened princes" who govern Europe; they would never think, she declares, of menacing the liberties of France or of coveting her territory. The point of departure of the war of 1792 is enveloped in confusion to her eyes. All that followed after, the great French epopee, is veiled to her imagination as to her heart. She loves not war; she fears the prestige and the usurpations of the sword; her ideas of military glory were those of a cosmopolitan Genevese and a European philosopher. Still, she would not have strangers interfering in the internal affairs of France; the moment that they attempt it her patriotism is aroused; she

believes that the whole nation should unite against them.

"In the political questions which now divide France, where lies the truth, will you say to me? Is it not a man's most sacred duty never to appeal to foreign arms against his country? Is not national independence the first good, seeing that degradation is the only irreparable ill?"

These are Narbonne's views. "No minister yet," wrote Marie Antoinette on Nov. 7, 1791. "Madame de Staël is working hard for M. de Narbonne. I never saw a stronger and more involved intrigue." And on December 7: "Comte Louis de Narbonne is at last Minister of War, since yesterday. What glory for Madame de Staël, and what a pleasure for her to have the whole army . . . on her side!" Madame de Staël had triumphed indeed. All the eloquence of Narbonne's speeches and reports was attributed to her. The fact is that this brilliant speech-maker was too lazy to write. She enjoyed the spectacle of important affairs, and cabals amused her. In her *salon*, at two solemn conferences of the Assembly, the missions of Custine to Brunswick and of Segur to Berlin were arranged. The diplomacy of the past could show no more entangled intrigues. No one

need be surprised to see even Clio stoop to employ her genius in them. These great people went from intrigue to political corruption as easily as from love to gallantry; they thought it sufficient to be formal and mind appearances. The appearances, however, were not very carefully guarded in the Berlin affair, and it made much scandal; but Narbonne had no time to spend on it.

This minister's disgrace turned Madame de Staël to her true vocation in the Revolution as a member of the victim's party. This brought into play her best quality, — her generosity. She risked for it her peace, her liberty, and at one time even her life. She was prodigal of her efforts and her fortune for its sake; she gave herself up to it without reserve and without regret; she practically forgot injuries without counting upon reward. The malicious world gladly weighed the weaknesses of her character against the eloquence of her words. It is but just to allow that, eloquently as she could talk of greatness of soul, her example surpassed her words, and the list of her debtors exceeds by a large number the ironical litany of her adorers composed by Rivarol.

She tried to save the queen; she did save Narbonne. She left Paris at the last hour, on September 29, and took refuge at Coppet,

which became from that time an asylum for the exiles.

There she did much good, but she found no repose. Madame Necker was seriously ill, and care for her health absorbed her husband. Madame de Staël found herself, in the "infernal peace" of solitude, thrown upon herself,— that is, given over to *ennui*, horrible *ennui*, as she says. Nature had no consolation for her: "I have a magnificent horror of the whole of Switzerland," she wrote. She saw her youth lost, her happiness ruined, her hopes withered. "Sorrow pursued me," said Delphine; "I fled before it." She fled to England. There she joined her friends, — Narbonne, Talleyrand, Montmorency, Lally, Jancourt, Malouet. But among them, in the French colony of refugees, she found again, embittered by misery and exile, all the heart-burnings of Paris.

In spite of her inexhaustible benevolence, the royalists continued to snarl at her. The extreme liberty of her speech, the carelessness of her manners, her familiar ways with her friends, their incorrigible indiscretion and intriguing spirit aggravated by their forced idleness, gave only too much ground to scandal-mongers. Lacking other refuge, the Old World in its drowning condition took refuge

in intolerance. The pell-mell of European society soon drew itself together. There was a general sifting. If Madame du Barry still was held in some consideration by the *beau monde* of the refugees, it was because she had been in favor with the Most Christian King. This indirect orthodoxy stood her in place of other virtues. Madame de Staël took the wrong view in the matter of having two chambers; she was irremediably compromised in the eyes of the royalists and their friends in England. They let her feel this to her mortification.

It would seem that Narbonne reproached her with the openness of her attachment for him and the criticism she incurred by her imprudences. He was subjected to a sort of ridicule which persons of his nature ill endure. The passion which he inspired in Madame de Staël was to him only an episode in his career of success; he now desired to pass on to the next chapter. Madame de Staël was always sincere in her attachments; she saw that she had been deceived, and she thought that she had never before tasted sorrow. It was hard for her to give up. "This dim ray of light," she says in her treatise on "The Passions," "strikes the reason before setting the heart free." This crisis left deep traces in

her writings. She had learned from a man upon whom she had lavished all her fond hopes, that "what we call reason is the disenchantment of life." She was at that time between twenty-five and twenty-six years of age, — the age of Delphine, the age of Corinne, the prophetic age for women, — "the epoch of misfortune laid down in the career of every passion. . . . At this epoch, when life ceases to grow, there is no future in your destiny; in many respects your fate is fixed, and men consider then whether it is worth their while to unite their fate with yours. If they see in it fewer advantages than they had anticipated, if by some means their expectations are deceived, they will, at the moment of separation from you, blame you in their hearts for their disappointments; they look for a thousand faults in you to absolve themselves from the greatest fault of all." She knew by sad experience that in the world as it exists, "men may seem to be good, and yet have caused women the most terrible suffering which it is possible for a mortal being to produce in the soul of another; they may seem to be true, and yet have deceived them; they may have received from a woman such services, such marks of devotion, as should bind two friends together, . . . and yet cut

loose from it all by attributing it all to love, — as though one sentiment, one gift the more, diminished the price of all the others."

She did not break her connection with Narbonne; she had a horror of that. In affairs of the heart, it was the feeling of emptiness that made her faint, the feeling of irreparableness that her imagination could not endure: "Never! Never! Word of iron and of fire! The tortures invented in the sufferer's dreams, the ever-revolving wheel, the water that recedes just as one draws near, the stones that fall as fast as they are carried up, are but weak expressions of that terrible thought, — the impossible and the irreparable. . . . What! my happiness torn from me, not by necessity, not by chance, but by a voluntary action, by an irreparable action! Lives there any that can bear that word *irreparable?* For myself, I believe it sprung from the infernal regions."

Friendship was to her but a derivation of love, whose language it borrowed. "Never," she says, "has there existed a person who carried farther than I the religion of friendship." She was always very reserved concerning the affair with Narbonne. Nevertheless there are a few significant rumors still afloat. "M. de Narbonne behaved very ill toward her, as successful men too often do," said

Madame Récamier, who knew all of Madame de Staël's secrets. Madame de Staël herself, in 1802, said: "Narbonne is a person of much grace;" and then in 1807 the following in reference to the Prince de Ligne, and it tells the whole story: "He has the manners of M. de Narbonne, *and a heart.*"

In spite of all this she found herself comparatively happy in England. At parting she thanked this land for four months of happiness which escaped the general shipwreck of life. She went about considerably, and took a bird's-eye view of society; saw some of Shakspeare's plays, glanced at English literature, and renewed her admiration of parliamentary institutions. She heard Pitt, who made a great impression on her; and Fox, who inspired her with admiration. She took notes for a future volume of "Considerations," and made observations especially for one then in hand on "The Passions." She wrote some chapters of this, and Talleyrand amused himself by correcting the style.

At Coppet, the last of May, 1793, she met again M. de Staël. The ambassador had left Paris in the month of February, 1792, recalled by the King of Sweden. He returned there by the command of the regent in February, 1793; the Revolution of the 2d of June

forced him again to leave. He remained at Coppet until the close of the year, crossing and recrossing his wife's course in life according to the events of his politics. Joseph de Maistre was then in Switzerland. He met the Neckers at the house of some friends of both. Madame de Staël and he talked about everything, and understood each other upon nothing whatever. She was to him a living abomination, — "science in petticoats!" "I never knew a head so completely perverted," he wrote. "Not having studied together either theology or politics, we have had scenes to make one expire with laughter, and yet without quarrelling in the least."

Madame de Staël was not able to save Marie Antoinette. She attempted to move her judges to pity, and wrote her "Reflections upon the Trial of the Queen." It was an appeal to women. The most heroic could then do nothing but kill like Charlotte Corday, or be killed like Madame Roland. The Terror literally crushed Madame de Staël. All effort became impossible to her. She gave herself up to reflections, and devoured her grief. Her books overflow with the expression of her feelings. She was too direct and too clear-sighted not to be wholly true to them: "To wake without hope, to bear every minute of the long day like a heavy burden,

to find no more interest or life in any of the habitual occupations, to regard Nature without pleasure, the future without plan . . ."

Madame Necker died in the month of May, 1794. Necker was one of those good souls who forget their own griefs only in consoling those of others. He devoted himself to his daughter. He taught her to occupy herself with her children, — she had two sons, — and their education began to fill in a measure her aimless days. What Necker was to her she has told everywhere and in every way. She has perhaps nowhere better expressed it than in this passage from "Delphine," —

"You have heard of the intelligence and rare talents of my father, but no one could ever describe to you the incredible union in him of perfect reason and deep sensibility, which makes him the safest of guides and the best of friends. He takes away from my mind everything that troubles it; he has studied the human heart in order the better to succor it in distress. . . . The heart has need of some *marvellous idea* to calm it and rescue it from numberless doubts and terrors born of the imagination; I find this necessary repose in the conviction that my father brings happiness to my lot."

As a mother she proved as attentive as she was devoted as a daughter and admirable as

a friend; but it was not her destiny to be absorbed in her family, or to be lulled by simple affections. There was no idea so *marvellous* that it could appease her insatiable thirst for illusion, and protect her heart against surprise. The trial through which she had just passed had cured her of the glamour, but she was still defenceless against the most blinding of all illusions, — admiration of one's misunderstood genius, and pity of one's misfortunes. She had experienced the deception of brilliant passions born in times of prosperity; she was about to expose herself to the sadder deception of a tragic passion conceived amid life's storms. "It is not," says Corinne, "the first love which is ineffaceable, it merely springs at the need of loving; but when after having known life, and when in the fulness of one's judgment one meets the soul and spirit for which until then one has sought in vain, the imagination is subdued by the reality, and one has reason to be unhappy." It was at such a time, to the sorrow of her life, that Madame de Staël met Benjamin Constant.

He was then twenty-seven years of age. He had led the life of an adventurer of passion all over Europe. We see him wandering in Germany and Bohemia, sojourning in England, and filling the *rôle* of chamberlain in Brunswick. He has met in Switzerland a rival of

Madame de Warens, whom he quickly converts into a confidant; and in Germany he marries a person of doubtful character, from whom he separates with more motives than he had for marrying her. A libertine, with a theatrical sort of excitability, dissipated, a gambler, and a duellist, he says of himself: "I have lived a very unsettled and, I will say, a very miserable life, filling those around me with wonder at my precocious talents and distrust of my violent, quarrelsome, and malicious character." He had marvellous faculties for grasping every subject, and a mind well able to clothe each one in sparkling and glowing imagery; he was insinuating, persuasive, keen, sarcastic, ironical; he observed and learned everything, in spite of his general debauchery of life and thought. He unfolded and displayed a genius capable of handling the universe, but he displayed it to every chance wind and let it float with every caprice. Incapable of concentration save momentarily and as though unintentionally; greedy for a glory that had no object; devoured by an aimless activity; full of cross-purposes and surprises; wedded to the world by his love of gambling, gallantries, and the vanity of his success in the *salons;* yet in the midst of all this filled with a longing for solitude. He was ambitious for conquests, but

impatient of bonds; he made a great pretence of enthusiasm, and especially of his ability to inspire it in others, but continually wasted his powers in fruitless analyses; he conceived plans which vanished on the instant, and he is inconsistent in every act of his life. He burns to obtain his independence, and yet knows not what to do with it; he ascribes everything to himself, yet is interested in nothing. "If I knew what I want," he says, "I should know better what I am doing." He purposed to be a man much beloved, and he was loved by the most extraordinary woman of her times; to be a statesman, and he was twice called to the councils of the most powerful ruler of the age; to be an illustrious thinker, and he made a mark in all the great debates of his day. And yet his work is but second-rate, and his life was but a series of abortive efforts. It was because in love he lacked sincerity; in politics, character; and in thought, continuity. He has left but one book, a novel of a few pages: it is in its way a masterpiece; but it is a confession of the impotence of the author to act, to do well, — to live at all, in fact.

At this time he was still young, and had not yet begun to draw a warning from his own faults. He seemed given to ideals, dreaming of the inaccessible, the unknown, the incom-

prehensible, appearing to bear upon him the burden of his times and the mystery of a future redemption. Otherwise, in figure more than in talents, he was the opposite of Guibert or Narbonne; "a tall, straight man," says a contemporary, "well formed, blond, a little pale, with long silky hair curling about his ears and neck." The air of having just returned from Germany was then the supreme elegance of poetry; but this Werther, with the candid brow wore also the sarcastic smile of the exquisite of the old *régime;* his eyes, generally hidden by glasses, sparkled in disputation; his speech, a little shrill, gave to his epigrams the keenness of a whistling arrow.

He charmed Madame de Staël with his wit, touched her pity with his troubles, and interested her with his ideas. He admired her. "She is a creature apart," he wrote, "a superior being such as one meets only once in an age." She was an ambassadress, and already a woman of fame. He found her "fighting her destiny. . . . One watches her with curiosity, like a beautiful storm." He was himself "at a period when his heart craved love, his vanity success." He set himself to the game, and seemed violently smitten. Madame de Staël cared little for him at first, says Madame Récamier; "but he made out such despair, and

threatened so often to kill himself, that he at last triumphed over her." She allowed herself to be overcome by a tumultuous passion which upset her whole life. She could never free herself from it.

Flattered as he was, Benjamin had no sooner enchained Madame de Staël to his life than the chain galled him. He was jealous of his independence, and still more so of his intellectual prestige. Madame de Staël loved him too despotically, and ruled him with too high a hand. Hers was the virile and superior soul; he was full of caprice, of nerves, a fragile and feminine soul. He felt it, took advantage of it, affecting lassitude, and threatening to break off their connection. She was jealous, she burst into tears; he left her, bitter and triumphant. Scarcely outside, he reproached himself with his cruelty. Life seemed dismal; he returned, consoled his friend, and was tender toward her. As soon as he saw her appeased, he was angry at his own weakness, and even before he was forgiven he was in haste to get away. This state of things set in at the very beginning of their relations, and these storms lasted for years. They wounded and healed each other perpetually. They were held together by the mind rather than by the heart. Each made the other shine by emulation, and each fanned

in the other the flame that was to them the very ardor of life. "Their tastes," says Corinne, "were not at all the same, their opinions rarely accorded, and yet in the depths of their souls there were nevertheless kindred mysteries."

They became acquainted in the month of September, 1794. Current events contributed to their infatuation, in seeming to open to them a common career of political activity. The 9th Thermidor brought hope to Madame de Staël. She was too hungry for it not to accept it with open hands. She had too much judgment in affairs to persist obstinately in her own notions. She sought for the possible, and devoted herself to it. In 1791 she was a monarchist, with Narbonne as constable of the constitutional monarchy; the year III would find her a republican, with Benjamin Constant as a legislator of the liberal republic. Talleyrand had gone from England to America; she in her own way undertook the same voyage. It seemed to her that the first essential for the establishment of liberty was the re-establishment of peace. Europe must give it; France must accept it. Europe must renounce the idea of dismembering France on pretext of ancient rights or present guaranties; and France must cease to invade her neighbors and to conquer

their territories on pretext of converting their people to equality. Otherwise neither the war nor the revolutionary directory which was the consequence of it would ever come to an end. M. de Staël sustained his wife in this sentiment. He returned to Coppet in the autumn of 1794. He desired peace, because he was humane and judicious; he endeavored to procure it between the Republic and Sweden, because he was, before all, a diplomat, and because Paris, in spite of the Revolution, seemed to him the most important post.

Madame de Staël was at her greatest fervor of admiration for England, its parliament, its prime minister, and the noble enterprise for the restoration of order in Europe which she attributed to them. They were the soul of the coalition. "M. Pitt and France, a nation and a man, — these are what it is most important to persuade," she said to herself. This was the object of a work which she published in Switzerland at the close of 1794, "Reflections concerning the Peace, addressed to M. Pitt and to the French People." In this Madame de Staël reveals herself as a political writer, but she is still an imitator. Her article is a sort of amplification of Mallet du Pan, whose writings she much admired. Otherwise her views are strong, political, and, finally, historical.

The Powers, she said, had dealt with the French people across the grain; they had endeavored to restore the Bourbon monarchy, to which France is either indifferent or hostile, and to re-establish the ancient *régime*, which was odious to her; they had threatened to treat all Frenchmen like bandits; they listened to the exiles, and refused to make use of them, "instead of keeping them without believing in them." These exiles endeavored to "return to the prejudices of the fourteenth century . . . they would have nothing left of a revolution which has stirred all the passions of mankind;" they see only the plots of intriguers in what the movement of the whole people has accomplished. "Never — in this revolution — have men been more than instruments of the dominant idea; the people regarded them as the means, not as the leaders." France will not yield either on the article of the ancient *régime*, or on the article of national independence. The interest of individuals, patriotism, pride of victory, enthusiasm for democratic ideas, all unite to interest the French in the success of the Republic. This is the resort of the Jacobins; war founded their reign, and sustains it. Do they wish peace? They must reassure the moderate party, which cannot prevail except by peace; and through the peace they must gain

France to the government of this party. France would accept peace if Europe would recognize the Republic and respect French territory. Let Europe beware. France no longer merely defends herself; she will invade. She is disposed to put a limit to her conquests; but "if the peace is not concluded this winter, it is impossible to predict at the centre of what empire the French will refuse it next year." So much for Pitt and his allies; so much for the French. Peace means liberty, pity, justice, and also policy. "France has no interest in warring against neighboring nations, and making them as belligerent as herself, by communicating to them the same spirit." Madame de Staël rises very high just here; she hurries the great reflux of the century. The Revolution in fact will return against France with greater fury, according as outside of France it takes on a more national and democratic character. Add to this the peril incurred from armies which will invade the Republic if they are not disbanded little by little, and if their importance to the State is not diminished. Unlimited conquest is a delusion. "Frenchmen! everything yields to you except the immutable nature of things which prevents you from founding a government under disorganizing principles." Cease to conquer; organize!

And you, Europeans, cease "to dispute for the territory which the volcano threatens to ingulf!"

Madame de Staël does not define any too clearly in this article the limits put by the "immutable nature of things" to the conquest over the land "which the volcano threatens to ingulf," and which Europe must abandon to the French. But she has explained it elsewhere with the utmost precision, and it is a feature of her thought which it is important henceforth to clear of all doubts. She premises, as fundamental elements of a nation, the "difference in languages, the natural limits, the recollections of a common history." Community of traditions, according to her, does away with difference of languages, and natural limits do away even with traditions. It is one of the "dominant ideas of the nineteenth century," she will say later. For France these limits are marked by the Pyrenees, the Alps, and the Rhine. "The eternal barrier of the Rhine separates the intellectual regions no less than the countries themselves." "That Rhine frontier is solemn; one dreads in passing it to hear oneself say those terrible words: You are outside of France!" The Republic desires and ought to desire peace within these limits. There "the strength of France is proportionate

to that of the other States of Europe." Beyond that France is out of bounds, and the Republic, once become aggressive, is vowed to a military government. It is with this reserve thought, latent somehow in the "Reflections" of the year III, that one must read the work, and that one must interpret everything, consequently, that Madame de Staël wrote on the conditions of peace between France and Europe, on the conquests of the Empire, on the independence of the people, and finally, on Germany.

The "Reflections" of 1794 facilitated her return to Paris. She went there in May, 1795; there she met M. de Staël re-established in his position as ambassador. The hotel in the rue du Bac was reopened, and Madame de Staël endeavored to reassemble her *salon* with the remains of society still afloat in Paris. "It was truly a strange spectacle. . . . One might see, every tenth day, all the elements of the old *régime* and the new, gathered together at these entertainments, but not reconciled. The elegant manners of the well-bred were apparent above the humble costume they still wore, as in the time of the Terror. The men converted from the Jacobin party entered for the first time the society of the fine world, and their pride was more sensitive regarding their

affectation of good manners than upon any other subject. The women of the old *régime* flocked around them to obtain places for their brothers, sons, and husbands; and the gracious flattery which they knew how to make use of tickled these gross ears, and disposed the most bitter partisans to what we afterward beheld; namely, the re-establishment of a court, with all the old abuses, each taking care, however, to lay the blame at the other's door."

The most moderate of the revolutionaries — the former Constitutional party, or as we should say nowadays, the Liberals — Daunou, Cabanis, Lanjuinais, Tracy, Ginguené, Chénier, Boissy d'Anglas, Roederer, Barras (the last in a connection less friendly and more worldly), all Republicans whose confidence Madame de Staël sought to gain; the ghosts of the Monarchy of 1791 whom she endeavored to win over to the Republic; the returned exiles, — "whom she was both pleased and sorry to receive," says one; writers who were taking up their presses and journals again, such as Dupont de Nemours, Morellet, Suard, the younger Lacretelle, and Adrien de Lezay, whose historical views pleased her, and whose singularly precocious ideas she later helped to settle into definitive judgments; round about these "the diplomatic corps, which was at

the feet of the Comité du Salut Public while always conspiring against it;" and in the midst of these four or five different tribes, which elbowed each other and watched each other with jealous eyes, was Benjamin Constant, restlessly seeking in the Republic a place for his vacillating ambition, sneering at the men, deriding their ideas, feared by everybody, esteemed by none,—there is the material of the celebrated circle of 1795. Madame de Staël would have been glad to receive Talleyrand; he would have been least out of place of all the guests in this brilliant caravansary of parties. He was still in America. He begged Madame de Staël to interest herself for him; he wrote to her: "If I stay another year here, it will kill me." He repeatedly anticipated his protestations of gratitude; indeed he exhausted the supply for the rest of his life. Madame de Staël obtained from the Convention a decree of release from banishment; but Talleyrand judged it more prudent, before reentering Paris, to land at Hamburg and there await the turn of events.

Madame de Staël watched the men around her, studied the course of affairs, and frequented the Assembly. She has preserved some very vivid reminiscences of the meetings during those days: —

"The apologies of those who took part in the Terror afford truly the most unlikely school of sophism that one could attend. . . . Lebon, Carrier, etc., were all noticeably of one general type of physiognomy. They read their arguments with pale and nervous countenance, going from one side of the tribune to the other, in the Convention, like wild animals in a cage; when seated they rocked to and fro without rising or changing their seats, with a sort of stationary agitation which seemed only to indicate the impossibility of being quiet."

(Meanwhile she pursued her plan of organizing the French Republic upon the model of the United States, as she formerly endeavored to transform the old Monarchy on the English system.) The former was at bottom the same government she had had in mind, with two chambers and an intellectual aristocracy which should substitute the aristocracy of birth; a republic of which Lafayette, set at liberty, would have been the president. The secret wish of Madame de Staël was to bring again into power, by this digression, the converted or reconciled Monarchists. "Let the Constitution be in the hands of honest men, and this Constitution will be recognized for what it is, the most reasonable in the universe," she said to Roederer. In order to attract to it those whom she called "honest men,"—that is to

say, the old friends of 1789–1791, — she wrote her second political pamphlet: "Reflections upon Internal Peace." It appeared in the summer of 1795. The republic, she said, is the only possible government; we must rally to it, and govern by it, so as to introduce that liberty which is the desire of the world. It is the drift of opinion: one must follow these currents; one cannot decide them. "Men of genius appear to create the nature of things, but they have merely the art of being the first to recognize it." Nothing really separates the republican friends of order from the monarchical friends of liberty. If the monarchists persist in wishing to restore the monarchy, only the exiles will profit by it; and besides, a restoration can never be accomplished save by a *coup d'état* or by force. "France may stop at the republic; but to reach a limited monarchy, she must pass through a military government."

The same fate which overtook royalty without royalists in 1791 naturally overtook this republic without republicans. Those who were urged to it accepted it as provisional only: they entered it as they would enter a wayside inn; they made no show of predilection. Those whom they wished to exclude, on the contrary, thought the edifice belonged

to them, and refused to leave it. They were the men who had fought for the Republic for three years, and who had given themselves up as hostages to the Revolution. The Constitutional party naturally coalesced against them and the aristocratic portion of the exiles, whose one thought was to regain the supremacy, and what they called the "aristocracy of regicides," whose one thought was to keep possession of it. Madame de Staël in vain protested her republican sentiments in her discourses, as she had formerly protested her monarchical sentiments; in vain she pushed conviction to the point of defending the famous decrees in the maintenance of two thirds of the Convention: but she convinced no one. The Convention accused her of not loving the Republicans, as the Court had once accused her of not loving the Royalists. The fact is that privately her preferences remained with her old-time friends, and that the majority among them openly conspired to overthrow the Republicans, if not to destroy even the Republic itself. The clash of self-interests poisoned still more the political suspicions. A republican among aristocrats, Madame de Staël remained, from valorous motives as much as from a sense of justice and from sympathy, an aristocrat among republicans.

The Comité de Salut Public accused her of playing a double game, and of encouraging the intrigues and plots of Royalists. It was the eternal contradiction in her life: she longed for Paris that she might re-establish her *salon* there; and scarcely was her *salon* reopened when it became impossible for her to remain in Paris. Louvait, who was a hypochondriac, denounced her secretly. Legendre, formerly a butcher, who had personal reasons for not loving *les salons dorés*, denounced her publicly. Staël was invited by the Government to remove his wife from Paris. He showed a firmness which was no more than decorous. The Comité appreciated the absurdity of the measure, and recalled it. Madame de Staël realized that her friends, her circle, and her politics had been too much talked about. It would never have entered her head to let herself be forgotten; but she set about a change of representation, and tried to appear before the world under another character. She now seemed for a time to dedicate herself to literature.

She collected the novels which she had written in her youth. She added to them "An Epistle to Misfortune; or Adèle and Édouard," in the most commonplace kind of verse; and a fragment entitled "Zulma: an

Episode intended to serve as a Chapter on Love in a Work on the Influence of the Passions." "Zulma" bore relation to the book on the Passions begun in London, as "Atala" was related, in Chateaubriand's imagination, to "Le Génie du Christianisme;" but although the scene in "Zulma" takes place "among the savages on the banks of the Orinoco," there is no other similarity between the two works. Zulma resembles much more one of the ancient painted attendants of the "Incas" of Marmontel than a forerunner of the Natchez. The whole was accompanied by an "Essay on Fiction," superior to both novels and episodes. This essay presents the first outline of the book on "Literature." The author, still under the spell of the crisis which France had just endured, endeavors to extract poetry therefrom. She passes the opinion that the realities of the Revolution surpassed in tragic horror the most terrific inventions of the poets. On coming out of this hell the imagination resorts by preference to the fictions of sentiment, which divert the soul, soothe, and console it. The future belongs to the romance, — a form of secondary importance heretofore, but which some great masters have already brought into regard. There is no thought of a historical novel. Tragedy may borrow her characters

from history; she does not disfigure them at all, "she separates them from whatever is mortal in them." The historical novel, on the contrary, "destroys the morality of history, overlaying the actions with a variety of motives that never existed." The romance of the future is a work "in which nothing is true, but in which everything is probable." A romance of this kind "is one of the most beautiful productions of the human mind." It must embrace all the passions, — pride, ambition, avarice, as well as love. History never gives a complete picture of the passions; it shows the result of them, but it does not analyze the motives nor uncover all the springs of them. It "does not attempt to portray the life of private individuals, or the sentiments and characters of those who have never contributed to public events." Romance creates its own drama; it creates its own moral and brings out the sanction of its own acts. History is governed by accomplished facts, and is always obscured by the glamour of glory. "The Princess of Cleves," "Paul and Virginia," are masterpieces; but "Heloise," "Clarissa Harlow," "Tom Jones," "Werther," — especially Werther, the revelation of German literature, "the superiority of which increases every day," — are the true models of this type.

If we consider that Madame de Staël cites in the first rank "most of the writings of Madame Riccoboni," but does not mention either "Marianne" or "Manon Lescaut," we may guess the drift of her mind when she attempts later, on her own account, to compose one of those "passionate and melancholy works" in which is shown "the omnipotence of the heart," and which sends forth "a voice heard in the desert of life," which gives at last "a day of distraction to sorrow." These lines are the conclusion of the "Essay on Fiction," and the tie between this essay and the treatise on "The Influence of the Passions on the Happiness of Individuals and Nations." Madame de Staël again took up this work at Coppet, where she re-established herself with her father in December, 1795. She was never, to speak accurately, exiled by the Directory; but that Government rendered her departure necessary and her return perilous. We shall now see her at work; let us examine her mode of labor at this period of her life, and see how her great works were prepared.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOOK ON "THE PASSIONS." — THE CONSULATE. — THE BOOK ON "LITERATURE." — "DELPHINE."

1796–1803.

MADAME DE STAËL wrote neither by vocation nor by profession. To her, writing was a makeshift in life and in politics. She wrote to divert her thoughts from herself and to get rid of the repletion of feelings that agitated her; but she loved better to talk than to write, and to write her own thoughts than to read the thoughts of others. It often happened that she was unable to fix her thoughts upon a book. "I do not understand anything of what I read," she would say then, "and I am obliged to write." She also wrote, especially at Coppet, for the pleasure of imparting her compositions to her guests, and to remind herself, at that distance, of Paris, which she always so sorely missed. It was indirect conversation. She warmed herself to her work when she had one in project; she ceased to care for it as soon as it was published. She

enjoyed the praises bestowed upon her writings much as though they were for her singing, her dancing, her eloquence, her intellect; but she was neither artful nor impatient concerning them. The successes of others did not offend her; discriminating eulogy of others did not strike her as a robbery; she could bear criticism, and she said: "Self-esteem must accustom itself to put a proper value upon praise, for in time one gets only what one deserves."

There was an irregularity in her mode of life even more than in her work. At Coppet, as at Paris, there was a continual coming and going of visitors. She improvised her books in the midst of them; her ideas gushed forth in repartee. (It was just here that Benjamin Constant was so valuable to her.) He electrified her. Many were the sparks struck off and lost in space. Chênedollé, one of the guests at Coppet, says: "She had more intellect than she could manage." What she kept she threw impromptu, in chance moments, upon scraps of paper. She scratched away at random, anywhere, — at her toilet, under the hands of the hair-dresser, standing before the mantelpiece, at table, or as she took her early breakfast. She had neither hours of retirement nor writing-desk. Far from wearying her, all these visits were a comfort to her.

She felt no one importunate. There was no study which she would not gladly abandon for conversation. A good memory, a rare presence of mind, enabled her to take up the broken thread again.

But this continual picking up implies an incessant breaking off; the seams harden and the inspiration grows cold. "Her improvisations," says Chênedollé again, "were much more brilliant than her writings." As soon as they were copied she read her chapters to her friends, and while reading she talked of them; after which she went over them again, improving them according to the advice received. In this way they grew and expanded; whether she would or no, whatever she remembered of her intercourse with others was sure to enter into her work. It was full of brilliant passages and witticisms, but it was also encumbered with digressions; it became wandering and uneven. Being loosely woven, it stretched, it broke, and was re-woven continually. But Madame de Staël heeded it not; and upon the proofs she poured forth still more, never economizing either a word or an idea.

In this manner the book on "The Passions" was composed; it appeared in the autumn of 1796. Critics have dwelt on the insufficiency of fundamental studies, the lack of method,

and the volatile and fugitive character of the thought in it. They lay too much stress on the compass of it, which is artificial, and on the *ensemble*, which is defective. The value of the work lies in the treatment of detail.

Madame de Staël conceived this work under the spell of the great disenchantments of 1793, and it bears this impress. "I will stifle within me," she said at that time, "everything that distinguishes me among women, — natural thoughts, passionate emotions, and generous impulses of enthusiasm; but I shall evade sorrow, dreadful sorrow." Where find a refuge? Man knows but few, — amusement for the frivolous, resignation for the strong, faith for the pious.

Faith was a quality lacking in Madame de Staël. She had a certain vague aspiration in her heart, a restlessness of imagination, a sort of undefined and instinctive religiosity which left a place open in her soul for faith. But she evaded the thought of it, fearful of finding only a vacuum. Roederer composed in 1796 an essay on "Funereal Institutions." In it he asked if the whole *raison d'être* of the belief in the immortality of the soul does not proceed from a "natural desire for a perpetuation of oneself in the memory of mankind." Madame de Staël wrote to him: "There is an

analysis of the desire for immortality which I dread to find true. Upon all these great subjects I have never had but one very positive thought. I have always believed that religious ideas should contribute toward the happiness of mankind, and I have treated myself as I suppose one should treat others; I am afraid to take them away from myself." They were like a prop to one who lives in fear of vertigo, rather than succor to a drowning soul.

And what of amusement? She made use of this undoubtedly, say her enemies; but she never pretended to be either satisfied or assuaged by it. She might try to forget herself in it, but she never esteemed herself frivolous, and would never have made forgetfulness a moral remedy. There remains only stoicism, therefore, as a retreat for the soul left to itself; the classic consolations of the philosophers,— friendship, study, benevolence. Friendship she finds but a pale-faced consolation. Study is for her more effective; and benevolence she finds more helpful even than study. But, after all, there is but one efficacious means of salvation, — flight. To fear the passions, which are the soul's bonds, to evade them, to get free from them, even at the price of rending oneself; to be resigned to receive life "drop by drop," like infants and wise men; to say

to oneself that the only true happiness lies in repose of soul, and that there is but one sentiment in the world that is not deceptive, namely, pity,—there, she says, "is a good, final cause in the moral order."

I have sought its effects, but it is not at Coppet that I have been able to see them. There passion rules. It was then that the author, in some letters which are a strange commentary on her book, wrote to a relative of Benjamin Constant: "Oh! I have felt strongly that upon him alone depends the fate of my life." This is the weak side of this moral treatise. But whoever knows the book finds in it a confession which is sincere and which forms its chief interest. Passion triumphs in it under all disguises, always overstepping the mark, always absorbed by itself, even in despair, and glorying in its wounds. "It cost me dear," says the writer, "to say that to love passionately was not true happiness." Madame de Staël said so, indeed, but she never believed it.

"At those altars on which I had kindled a flame
I gave all to that God whom I trembled to name."[1]

This is all there is to the book, and it is what Madame de Staël made it in spite of her-

[1] "Même au pied des autels que je faisais fumer
J'offrais tout à ce Dieu que je n'osais nommer."

self. What she intended to make it is quite another thing. She would like to have confounded her calumniators by a very grave and austere production. "Condemned to celebrity without being understood, I feel the necessity of making myself judged by my writings. . . . Calumniated continually, and finding myself of too little importance to talk about myself, I have yielded to the hope that in publishing this fruit of my meditations I may give a true idea of my habits of life and of the nature of my character." Then follows this majestic introduction of the book, which appears to be a sort of "Spirit of the Laws" applied to the passions: "Governments should minister to the real happiness of all, and moralists should teach individuals to dispense with happiness." The part concerning the duties of governments remained in project, and one cannot regret it; the part called "Of Moralists" is the one part completed. She persuaded no one, the author least of all women in the world, and least of all at the time when the book was brought forth.

The analysis which Madame de Staël makes of the passions is diffuse, and at times its style of rhetoric is rather odd. One smiles at this beginning of a dissertation — one might almost call it a *fantaisie brillante* — "On Suicide":

"He who will include suicide in the number of his resolutions may enter upon the career of the passions." Madame de Staël deals with love in limited and absolute monarchies and in republics. She speaks of ambition like a person who has never observed its effects; it seems as though she had never known either Mirabeau or Narbonne, or even Necker. She speaks of love, on the other hand, like a woman consumed and penetrated by those fiery passions of which Pascal treats. On this theme she is inexhaustible. She seems to have in herself no conception either of lassitude or, with stronger reason, of the nausea of a passion that is spent. The bitter restlessness of "Adolphe" is absent from her writings. But love unsatisfied, love misunderstood, love betrayed, all the crises of neglect and the abandonment of love, all the dolorous repertory of Phèdre and Hermione, are poured forth from her pen in infinite lamentations, always eloquent and moving. There is heard amid them a note which announces new harmonies in literature. The happiness of love is sad, not merely because of vanity or the satiety of pleasure, but because of the thought of death, which is inseparable from it. "Love when a passion always brings melancholy. There is an inward conviction that all that comes

after love is as nothing; . . . and this conviction makes one think of death even in the happiest moments of love." We feel that Chateaubriand is about to appear, and that Lamartine is born. Then follow real heart-cries which let her secret escape: "Brilliant successes would seem to offer the proudest gratification to the friend of the woman who obtains them; but the enthusiasm to which these successes give birth is perhaps less lasting than the attraction founded upon the most frivolous advantages. A woman's face, be the strength or extent of her intellect what it may, . . . is always either an obstacle or an advantage in the history of her life; *men have always chosen to have it so.*"

Along with these avowals Madame de Staël introduces here and there in her book some souvenirs of the Revolution, and some masterful pages which reveal the historian. We may well compare them with those which Joseph de Maistre wrote about the same time in his "Considerations on France." "We think," says Madame de Staël, "that we may influence revolutions, that we may influence or be the cause, yet we are only a stone thrown aside by the turning of the great wheel; another might have taken your place, a different means might have produced the same result; the

name of chief signifies the first to be precipitated by the crowd that marches behind, always pushing to the front." She had already written in 1795: "When Robespierre tried to separate himself from his companions and make his own destiny, he was lost; he had no personal force, he only ruled when he put himself at the head of all the crimes."

The treatise on "The Passions" made a great sensation. Madame de Staël desired this heartily, and hoped that success would reopen to her the gates of Paris. "Commend the book," she wrote to Roederer, "so that the author be not persecuted." It was indeed persecution which then began and continued for eighteen years, with more or less brief intervals of truce. "Her conduct in Paris has afflicted the friends of liberty very much," wrote Delacroix, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the minister-resident at Geneva, in December of 1795. The resident had orders to watch the relations of Madame de Staël with strangers and exiles, notably with Wickham and Narbonne. They were suspected of fostering rebellion in the East. From that time Madame de Staël had the police in pursuit, and her record in the hands of the police. When Narbonne approached from the frontier, the Directory ordered "that he be carried off with all his

papers." They accused Madame de Staël, "always garrulous and intriguing by nature," of serving as emissary to conspirators. If she tried to go into France, she was to be stopped. She exposed herself to no risks, however, and remained provisionally at Coppet. But she made every endeavor to obtain a passport. She alleged the necessity of putting her affairs in order; her husband was dissipating her children's patrimony: with a revenue of eighty thousand livres, he had managed to accumulate a debt of two hundred thousand livres. The exile's solicitations were urged according as the fever to get to Paris raged upon her. "The winter in this place is mortal to me," she wrote to Roederer; "I spit blood all last winter, and the north wind does me intolerable harm." Her friends reasoned with her, but she rebelled. "I only understand love as life: one must mourn for what it lacks." She protests her attachment to the Republic. Her desire is so keen that she forgets sincerely her acts and writings, — everything that has compromised her, and everything that has done her honor. "Since the 10th of August," she declared to the minister-resident of the Republic at Geneva, "I have not written a line that could relate to the operations of the Government." She stopped at no contradic-

tions. "Do you not think," she asked of the same resident some time afterward, "that the Directory would be glad to see me in Paris? They know that I am part author of Benjamin Constant's work, and, that granted, they have no right to suspect my devotion to the cause."

Indeed, this work of Benjamin, "On the Strength of the Present Government of France and the Necessity of supporting it," had made some stir. Talleyrand, who in his retreat at Hamburg had received with the pamphlet an account of affairs at Coppet, wrote discreetly to Madame de Staël: "Who is this Benjamin Constant, author of a very remarkable book which I have just read? Is he attached to Narbonne? I found in it many things that might have been thought or written by the two together; I found indeed in some shape Narbonne's very remarks, or reminders of them."

At last, in the month of April, 1797, she was permitted to re-enter her own hotel. She thought she should thereafter dwell there in peace. Her friends were again in power. Talleyrand took charge of the Foreign Affairs, and intended to associate Benjamin Constant with him as general secretary. Madame de Staël recommenced her dinners. Among the new guests were to be seen Lucien and Joseph

Bonaparte; the latter was always faithful to her. But scarcely was she again at home ere she found herself the butt of party attacks. The Royalists called her a "fury." It was because she had no respect for their persons and condemned their politics. She had nothing to hope from their return to government. She expected liberty and justice from them least of all in the world. She knew them well. She was by no means allured by their new pretexts. She would not take their programmes for acts of faith, nor their watchwords for their word of honor.

"The Royalist party in both councils invoked Republican principles, liberty of the press, liberty of suffrage, — all sorts of liberty in fact, especially that of overturning the Directory. The popular party, on the contrary, built always upon circumstances, and defended revolutionary measures which served as a momentary guaranty to the Government. The Republicans were constrained to disavow their own principles, because they were used by others against themselves; and the Royalists borrowed the weapons of the Republicans to attack the Republic."

She deplored the *coup d'état* of Fructidor, but she deplored particularly that this *coup d'état*, so disastrous to republican liberty, seemed necessary to the welfare of the Republic. "I would surely never have advised," she

said, "the establishment of a republic in France; but once in existence, I should not be inclined to wish to overturn it." What she condemned unreservedly were the proscriptions and the fresh terrorism which fell upon the Jacobins. "She made the 18th, but not the 19th," said Talleyrand. On the 18th she was with the party in power; on the 19th she was once more with the party of the victims, and she groaned to see her friends more divided and more impotent than ever.

Bonaparte came back to Paris bringing trophies of Italy. He had genius, glory, judgment, magnanimity, youth, fortune. Everything paled before him. Madame de Staël did not perceive in him then the deformities which she was pleased to represent in him by and by. He seemed to her remarkable "for character and intellect as well as for his victories," — merciful to the vanquished, to whom he promised justice; speaking "to the imagination of the French people;" "sensible of the beauties of Ossian;" gifted with "all the generous qualities which throw the more extraordinary qualities into relief." She saw him then as he appeared in David's immortal picture, — the figure rather slim and nervous, buttoned up to the throat in the plain gray redingote; the cheeks pale and hollow, the

brow wide and high under the long tumbling locks, the eagle nose, the eyes open to the far infinite, searching space, and with something imperious, eager, and melancholy in them all at once; the halo of success and the fascination of mystery.

"Cleopatra[1] was not possessed of striking beauty, but her grace and intellect illumined her face with such charms that it was difficult to resist her. She especially possessed the art of captivating. Her constant relations with Greece had developed in her the penetrating charm of the language and its seductiveness. Cæsar had the virtues and passions which drew her to his own interests, and it was rather by genius than by calculation that he succeeded in everything."

The dream which thus crossed Madame de Staël's mind left no traces save in these lines of an article contained in the "Biographie Universelle." But these are luminous. The deception was immediate. The enchantment was broken at the first interview, under the gaze of the steely-eyed Corsican. One cannot say which Madame de Staël pardoned less in Bonaparte, — her not having understood him or her consternation before him. Not only did she not captivate him, but (and the fact was a sort of

[1] "Cléopatre," an article by Madame de Staël in the "Biographie Universelle," 1811–1813.

monstrous prodigy to her) he reduced her to silence. "I found no words to reply to him when he came to me to say that he had looked for my father at Coppet. . . . When I had recovered a little from my confusion of admiration, I was seized with a strong feeling of fear. . . . I saw him several times, and yet I was never able to overcome the difficulty of breathing which I felt in his presence. . . . Each time that I heard him speak I was struck with his superiority." But each time also she felt his inaccessibility. Her kind of inspired political women was unendurable to him. "She was carried away by him," reports a contemporary, who himself was much dazzled by Bonaparte at that time and very acrimonious toward Madame de Staël; "she sought and followed him everywhere; . . . she aroused his dislike at once. Madame de Staël, after having made him uneasy, made him displeased. He received her advances coldly. He disconcerted her by his firm and sometimes withering words /A sort of defiance was set up between them, and, as they were both passionate, this defiance was not long in turning to hatred.)

They did not reach absolute hatred until three years later; but Madame de Staël had a presentiment of it from the beginning. If she essayed to re-conquer him by her charms, it was

because, with her, illusion was stronger than judgment. In the mean time she continued to travel between Coppet and Paris, dividing herself between the great affection and the great ambition that filled her existence, — her father and her *salon*. She had two sons, — one born in 1790, the other in 1792; in October, 1797, at Coppet, she had a daughter Albertine, — the happiness and crown of her life, who, of all the felicities she longed for, gave her the only one that never failed her.

In Switzerland she had Chênedollé as her guest. In Paris she was much with Madame Recamier and Madame de Beaumont. She worked, in her leisure hours in Switzerland, upon a new work, but this did not absorb all her time. "Being yet a young and impressionable woman," she wrote to Roederer, "I do not yet live wholly within my own self-esteem. The time will come only too soon when my book will be the most important event in my life."

She returned to Paris the evening of the 18th Brumaire. The event of that day did not surprise her, but she would have preferred another man for it. Always an admirer of the American Republic and of the English Constitution, she would have preferred, if there must be a soldier in power, a Washington or

at least a William of Orange. She thought of Moreau: "His virtues rendered him worthy the place;" and of Bernadotte, who "combined the qualities both of statesman and soldier." A Roman republic succeeding a state entirely Roman as to its laws, seemed to her as odious as the old *régime.* Nothing appeared more formidable to liberty than a Cæsar installed in the monarchy of Louis XIV. Nevertheless in the first weeks she again made trial of coquetry with the new master. Bonaparte appeared to soften. He placed Benjamin Constant in the tribune; but Benjamin immediately threw himself into the Opposition. About the month of January, 1800, he decided to denounce to the world the "dawn of tyranny." His discourse was prepared in Madame de Staël's *salon.* "Now," said Benjamin to her, "your *salon* is full of people whom you like; if I speak, to-morrow it will be deserted. Think well of it!" "One must follow one's convictions," she replied. He made his discourse. Madame de Staël had invited to dinner that evening several friends who belonged to the Government party. At five o'clock she had received ten excuses. One was from Talleyrand; this was a rupture of contact for years, and of esteem for all their lives long.

Her *salon* began to be suspected. Fouché had some compassion for Madame de Staël, and she considered him a man of "extraordinary talent for revolution." He tried to reason with her. "The First Consul," he said, "accuses you of inciting your friends against his government." She declared that she was incapable of that; and perhaps she believed so while she said it. But Fouché was not so wholly convinced as to be able to persuade his master. Bonaparte was then on his way to Italy. In passing through Switzerland, he stopped at Coppet and visited Necker. Necker did not think him so extraordinary as the public seemed to do, and was not, like his daughter, dumfounded in his presence. He gave him a lesson, as he had formerly done to Louis XVI. Bonaparte little thought that he would one day become by alliance the nephew of that unfortunate king. He took his lesson with a bad grace. Necker left upon him the impression of a judicious banker led astray by an ideal and blind in State affairs.

Madame de Staël arrived a little later, and remained all summer in Switzerland, writing letter after letter to her friends in Paris in her endeavor to manage her return in the winter. "What woman," she said to Roederer, "has ever shown herself more enthusiastic for

Bonaparte than I?" "We hope for peace here, and we admire Bonaparte very much," she wrote in July to a new friend who became a great favorite, namely, Fauriel. But at the same time, under the stroke of disappointment and impatience, her sharp words shot forth only too freely; and one can imagine the motives with which the Government spies and the public generally charged her, from the traces she has left in her souvenirs: "I hoped that Bonaparte would be defeated, for this seemed the only way to put a stop to the advance of tyranny. . . . The good of France demanded that she suffer reverses. . . . Did not Moreau regret the laurels of Stockach and Hohenlinden? He saw only France in the First Consul's orders; but such a man should have felt justified in judging the Government which employed him, and should have asserted, under the circumstances, what he considered the true interests of his country." The reports received from Switzerland were not at all of a nature to weaken the precautions of the First Consul. (Madame de Staël capped the climax by publishing a book which was, like all her previous conduct, a singular mixture of coquetry toward Bonaparte in person, of satirical allusions to his government, and of conspiracy

against his power: "Literature considered in its Relations to Social Institutions."

This work, which made a volume of six hundred pages, appeared in the month of April, 1800. It is a thesis on the perfectibility — we should say nowadays the progress — of the human mind in all its works. This progress finds its consecration in liberty; liberty finds its security in republican institutions conceived and applied according to the author's system. French literature regenerated by republican customs will be rejuvenated by the influence of foreign literatures.

To show the relations existing between literature and social customs, to seek out those which may exist between literature and political institutions, is to do the work of the philosophical historian, and project a design inspired by Montesquieu; but for such a work there was need of immense study, illimitable reading, universal knowledge, and a superior critical faculty. Madame de Staël had these only in part, added to a good will and occasional inspirations. It needed, above all, a complete disinterestedness of mind which should allow itself to be shaped by history. Madame de Staël was not ready to yield herself on this point; she goes far beyond this. As she is sustaining a thesis on the progress of all

things, and notably of literature under liberty, she makes history yield to her point. The effort which the writer makes confuses her own intelligence, and disturbs her naturally good faculties of discrimination, particularly as concerning the ancients.

Madame de Staël speaks of the Romans better than of the Greeks, — not that she prefers the genius of Rome, but she understands it more thoroughly. Inferences abound in these chapters; and judged at this distance, they seem strangely wide of the mark. Why, it is in the time of the reappearance of the very wonders of Rome, and when history seems repeating its prodigies, that the author writes, — and thinks she is composing an epigram: "Among the ancients genius was permitted to nominate itself, and virtue to offer its services. The nation gladly recognized their ambition for her esteem. Nowadays one must glide into glory by stealth. . . . Mediocrity is all-powerful!"

Happily the chapters do not consist wholly of clever sayings. They unfold a number of views in politics and history, — this among others: the art of thinking is associated with the conservation of liberty; democracy has need of a pure language and beautiful eloquence to keep the mind constantly in a state of dignity. It is

this constant poise of the soul which "makes mere territory a fatherland by giving to the nation which inhabits it a unity of tastes, customs, and sentiments." Military strength, which always remains the same in its nature, will never establish anything original in spiritual progress; it breaks the wills of men, it never forms the character which in groups of men makes nations.

The author develops an opinion concerning the Middle Ages which is little short of hazardous for her times: The human race did not retrograde during that period. History has an invariable object in view, — universal civilization; it works for that object without ceasing, and it is "thought, always the same, which we see arising from the abysm of facts and of ages."

We perceive, in this voyage of exploration which Madame de Staël makes through modern literatures, that she knows little of Italy and still less of Spain. She speaks well of Machiavelli, understands Dante but little, and Cervantes not at all. She is in haste to reach the North, which attracts and holds her attention. She sees everywhere in the North "the spirit of liberty," and she constructs her theory on the authenticity of the poems of Ossian. Fancy plays a very large part in these essays, but

invention has its share also. For example, this thought bears some resemblance to what was said of love's melancholy in the book on "The Passions," — "Man owes his greatest achievements to the sad conviction of the incompleteness of his destiny." Madame de Staël shows in Shakspeare tragic beauties of a new order for French minds, — "pity with no mixture of admiration for the sufferer, pity for an insignificant and even a contemptible creature."

The chapter on German literature has but one point of interest: it merely shows how much Madame de Staël knew of Germany before going there. She knew vastly more than is commonly supposed, but she knew it at second or even third hand, through her friends Benjamin Constant, Chênedollé, Adrien de Lezay, Gérando, and especially Charles de Villers, who was her initiator. There was much translating and much imitating done toward the close of the old *régime*. There was a return to it as soon as there was leisure again. Poems, romances, dramas, Goethe, Schiller, Klopstock, Wieland, were introduced into France; but they were so clothed as to be more or less disguised, under the pretext of putting them more in touch and fashion at Paris.

As there was no political liberty in France in

the seventeenth century, Madame de Staël will recognize only a theatrical literature there. The theatre, in her eyes, absorbed everything. She does not appear to have read "L'Histoire des Variations," nor meditated upon the "Thoughts" of Pascal. She immeasurably overrates the eighteenth century. She treats Voltaire as a poet. She makes this *résumé* on Jean Jacques: "He discovered nothing, but he set fire to everything." Next she comes to the future, which she believes she can discern. Montesquieu, Rousseau, Condillac, republican spirits all, she says, began the revolution of literature. It was fitting that licentiousness should be banished from books as from manners, under the Republic. The object of literature will no longer be, as in the seventeenth century, the art of writing; it will be the art of thinking, and literary greatness will be commensurate with the progress of civilization.

She stops here a moment to descant on the destiny of women writers. She puts into maxims her own personal experience. Marie Antoinette and Rivarol made sport of her, the Directory tormented her; so she says, "Under monarchies women [who write] have to fear ridicule; under republics, hatred." Of Montesquieu her praise is cheap. It costs her no more to add this aphorism, which would have

made Catherine the Great pensive: Women without talent for conversation or literature have ordinarily more talent for shirking their duties; and nations without enlightenment know not how to be free, but often change masters."

She insists that politics could become a science; but her good sense warns her at once against the "atrocious absurdities" of the charlatanry of formulæ and social algebra. "Though calculation be never so precise," she says, "if it is not in accordance with morality, it is false." "Morality is the nature of things in the intellectual order." Virtue proceeds from enthusiasm; analysis kills it. Madame de Staël declares that the romance will become more impassioned, and will take its ideas still more from observation of the world. She believes that comedy will abandon the ridiculous in order to attack vice and unmask the cynic, the brazen, the "charlatans of vice, the scorners of principle, the mockers at the soul;" comedy will snatch away their mask of pretended proficiency, and will show them crouching at the feet of true power. Madame de Staël thus pre-announces her own romances, and predicts a theatre which will not prevail until much later.

She seeks in a groping way for the roads

that poetry will take, but discovers them not. Poetry still remains with the rhetoric of her youth. She sees the future of poetry in the progress of reason and the development of eloquence. The poetry of her own time has passed her by, and she has not even suspected it; the new poetry is springing up all around her, and she does not discern it.

She had not known the great poet, her contemporary, the man who was called to regenerate the French poetry of his times; the Terror crushed him, jealously desirous of annihilating all that was original and fecund in the genius of the age. In the elegy, the ode, and the satire André Chénier found the forms best suited to the spirit of his generation to sing of love and to defend liberty. In his "Hermes" he maps out the poem of an age that contained Montesquieu, Diderot, Buffon, Lamarck, Lavoisier, Laplace, Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, and André-Marie Ampère. Had it not been for the envious folly of Robespierre, France might have had her Goethe. The guillotine spared mediocrity. Republican literature had nothing but versifiers. Poetry was preparing to revenge herself by very different means.

Chateaubriand wrote his "Génie du Christianisme" about the time that Madame de Staël

published her book on "Literature." They were the antipodes of each other. Chateaubriand felt that she was a rival and hostile, as did Rivarol of old, when she began to speak. But this was a more serious rivalry. Here was no question of rivalry in the *salon;* it was a question of the intellectual domination of the epoch. Chateaubriand wrote to Fontanes concerning Madame de Staël's book a letter full of naughty insinuations: "My particular hobby is to see Jesus Christ everywhere, as Madame de Staël sees perfectibility. . . . She really has the air of not liking the present government and of regretting the days of greater liberty." Madame de Staël cherished no rancor; "Atala" made her forget the offence, and she pardoned the author in admiring him. But though Chateaubriand attracted her, he did not convert her to his Neo-Christian rhetoric.

"I think him more melancholy than sensitive," she wrote. She and her friends belonged too much to the old days, and were too much filled with the philosophical spirit to fall into the romantic snare. They could not understand religion, either as the State machine of Bonaparte or as the poetical machine of Chateaubriand. This "religion of bells," as some one has wittily called it, this "Catholic Epicureanism," this "religious fatuity" of the

author of "Atala," seemed to them false and affected, with just a shade of silliness. Madame de Staël had to read Klopstock in the original tongue, to become acquainted with Schiller, to take lessons of Schlegel, and to converse with Goethe especially, in order to comprehend what elements of poetry one could draw from Christianity, — from its traditions, its songs, and its ceremonies. In her heart she never yielded to it completely, granting exceptions, but rejecting the theory, and too sensible of the incongruities of detail to be dazzled by it. "This poor Chateaubriand will cover himself with ridicule," she wrote. "He has a chapter headed 'A study of virginity in its poetical relations.'"

But before Chateaubriand caused her this astonishment she found herself denounced on every hand for her "Literature." This book, said Fontanes, presents "the ideal of a perfection sought for the sake of opposition to whatever now is."

Fontanes and the other critics of the consular antechamber gladly condemned it. Madame de Staël was not at this time wishing the fall of the Consulate; on the contrary, she was hoping to make for herself a place in it and to be an ornament to it. She put her conditions as she would put those of history. Just what did

she desire? Nothing commonplace, surely. She was not avaricious. The material benefits of power were nothing to her; she was not capable either of the discreet and prudent fidelity of a Maintenon, or of the secret and tenacious intrigue of one of the Ursins; it was fame that she wished for. She was an orator from the soul, and, by reason of her temperament, orator of the Opposition. The rule of Fox in England, or of Lamartine in the Government of July, — this would have been her political vocation, had she been a man. As a woman, at the side of an all-powerful master, she longed to become the companion of his genius and the official muse of his reign. Whoever can read between the lines will find this insinuated constantly in the book on "Literature." There is no malicious allusion in the book which is not atoned for by this maxim: "Genius is good sense applied to new ideas." She allowed this genius to Bonaparte; but Bonaparte understood the new ideas differently.

To him the essential idea was the popular idea which Danton with his powerful realism had defined in a word, — to profit by the Revolution. The people intended to profit by the Revolution. Bonaparte intended to absorb the Revolution and glorify it in his person.

Power, wealth, conquest, government, — these were his objects and motives of action. He was the State, under all its forms. (His Republic was the reverse of Madame de Staël's.) She had reproved in Mirabeau a regal democracy; she had an instinctive horror of the Cæsarian democracy which arose with the Consulate. Bonaparte judged her clearly as he judged everything else. He demanded obedience, first of all. His system implied a censor and a police over the public mind; there was no place in his empire for a bureau of liberal enthusiasm. Madame de Staël proposed grandeur at this price to him, and offered him peace. Grandeur, as later the crown, he will not receive save at his own hands; the peace of liberal *salons* he has no belief in, more than in the peace of European councils. The fatality of his destiny doomed him to support himself only by his own efforts, to defend himself only by attacking, to protect himself only by invasion. This was why there could be nothing in common between him and Madame de Staël.

He rudely showed her this, and she was roused to war with him the more aggressively as she had formerly been so coquettish with him. When she returned to Paris, in March, 1802, and was established in the rue Grenelle,

she surrounded herself with all those who still dared to shine outside the precincts of the Consul. This was the period of greatest splendor for her *salon*. Near her was the friend of her heart, Madame Récamier, — "la belle Juliette," as she called her, — the enchantment of all eyes; Madame de Beaumont, of melancholy and sickly grace; her old friends, save Talleyrand, who kept out of the way, more careful for the State than he had been for the Church, but including Narbonne, who escaped sometimes from the surveillance of Madame de Laval, and reappeared much crestfallen; Benjamin, an incomparable interlocutor, who leads the orchestra; Camille Jordan, in politics the beloved disciple; Gérando, who expounds Germany; Fauriel, who expatiates on the literatures of the South. This is also the high-water mark of Madame de Staël's own eloquence and marvellous conversation, strewn with charming traits, enlivened with subtle repartee, delicious wit, gayety, satire, historic suggestiveness, penetrating analyses of the heart, of sentiment still more, and of enthusiasm. "If I were queen," said Madame de Tessé, "I would command Madame de Staël to talk to me forever."

Bonaparte was determined to silence her. She felt his iron hand upon her shoulder and writhed under it. Then ensued a shower of

epigrams interspersed with couplets of lofty indignation and magnificent protestations. She gave herself up to a bitter and morbid spirit which her anger let loose within her, and which, say her hearers, "carried fire and sword with it." Benjamin, being then in disgrace, had no power to stay her darts. The whole consulate was arraigned before this sarcastic tribunal: "We heard every evening the accounts of Bonaparte's meetings with his committee; and these accounts might have amused us if they had not made us deeply anxious for the fate of France." Nothing was spared, not even the system which "conciliated men's interests at the expense of their virtues, depraved opinion by means of sophisms, and gave to the nation as an aim war instead of liberty." Neither did she spare the courtiers, who were either confessed regicides or royalists won over, and all "chevaliers of circumstance;" nor the priests, — "he had need of a clergy as of councillors." Nor did the master himself escape, — "the *bourgeois* gentleman on the throne," who was annoyed by the "ascendancy" of women, "whose petty qualities were soured by the spirit of the *salon* . . . and the mockery of good society," and who cannot conceal "a certain Jacobin antipathy toward brilliant society;" "his little body and big

head, his I know not what of awkwardness and arrogance, of disdain and of embarrassment, a combination of the bad grace of a *parvenu* and the audacity of a tyrant;" "he cannot express himself in fluent language, . . . he is only eloquent to injure;" his genius is only "charlatanism;" he "mystifies" the diplomats, and throws dust in the eyes of the military; he is not even a hero, — at Marengo when the fate of the battle seemed desperate, he remained inactive, moved slowly about on his horse before the troops, "pensive, his head bowed, . . . more courageous in face of danger than in face of misfortune, making no effort, but waiting for fortune;" in fine, "throughout his nature there is a basis of vulgarity which even the enormity of his imagination will not always be able to hide."

Add to her words her cabals with hostile or envious generals like Moreau and Bernadotte; her indiscreet statements such as, "I was with the English minister when he received the conditions of the peace [of Amiens]; he read them aloud to those who were dining with him, and I cannot express the astonishment I felt at each article. England was to resign all her conquests!" "I delayed my return to Paris so as not to be a witness of the grand *fêtes* in honor of the peace." These are all

manifestations of a belief which possessed her then and did not leave her until 1815, after she had experienced two foreign invasions and the deception of two royalist restorations. Her idea was that Europe longed only to give peace to France along the Rhine frontier, and that France asked only to enjoy political liberty under a constitution modelled on that of England; that there was only one obstacle in the way of the reign of justice and of happiness for the world, namely, Bonaparte himself. Madame de Staël would not go quite so far as to approve the attempts on the life of the First Consul, — these she was bound to condemn; but she longed for Bonaparte's fall even at the price of the defeat of the French armies.

Here was enough to make such a man as the First Consul beside himself. "She talks back in a way that does not suit me," said he. Necker published a book called "Recent Views on Politics and Finance." He "felt a desire to write against the tyranny of one, after having so long contested that of the multitude." He traced in perspective all the "scaffolding" of imperial monarchy. This article annoyed Bonaparte as much as Fontanes's famous "Parallel between Cæsar, Cromwell, Monk, and Bonaparte" had flattered him. (He accused Madame de Staël of having led her father into

error concerning Parisian opinion, and he was in a rage.

We must here make allowances for circumstances, which were still of a revolutionary nature, and for the character of Bonaparte, which was more than despotic. But we must also allow for the necessity for absolute power and its conditions. Great leaders of men have never been patient with feminine cabals. Madame de Guéméné and Madame de Chevreuse made trial of this in the time of the great Cardinal. One asks how Louis XIV. with his august politeness would have treated the *grande dame* who allowed herself to hold in Paris a court of Jansenists or a circle of bold spirits mixed with rebellious reformers. The gowns of the Port Royalists did not protect them from the brutality of the *gens d'armes*. Having conceded this point, enough still remains to convict Bonaparte's rage and proscriptions of bad taste and undue severity. So many decrees, police, soldiery, despatches, and big, swelling words, — all for a *salon* where people meet to talk!

"Quoi! vous vous arrêtez aux songes d'une femme!"[1]

One can hardly help smiling, at this distance of time, in thinking of the fury of the lion ex-

[1] "What! you are stopped by a woman's dreams!"

asperated by the notes of the mocking-bird: the bird hops from branch to branch, flies away, and still keeps on singing; the lion shakes his mane, rolls his eyes, foams at the mouth, paws the earth, and struggles in vain. Napoleon aggrandized Madame de Staël in raising her to the dignity of a powerful antagonist; he belittled himself by the stress of the blows he dealt the empty air in his efforts to crush her. When Madame de Staël exhibits a theatrical depth of despair in exile, when she poses too complacently as the victim of tragedy, as persecuted Andromache, she is nevertheless playing her proper *rôle;* she suffers sincerely, and one really pities her. Napoleon loses majesty; he steps out of his part. His measures are odious, his imprecations ridiculous. In this struggle, which lasted ten years, Madame de Staël has the last word, and the word is that of a *femme d'esprit.* "What a cruel fame you give me!" she wrote to Bonaparte in 1803; "I shall have a few lines in your history."

There were some preliminaries to the exile in the spring of 1802; namely, the interdiction of her *salon* and the quarantine of her friends. "What made my position more bitter was that the good people of France seemed to see in Bonaparte its preserver from anarchy or

Jacobinism. It blames strongly the spirit of opposition which I show toward him." "The good people deserted you at the same time as the favor of the government, — a situation insupportable to a woman, and the bitterness of which no one can know without experience." "I had need of yet greater strength to endure the persecution of society than to risk that of power. I have always retained a remembrance of one of those slights of the *salon* which French aristocrats know so well how to inflict on those who do not share their opinions."

She does not exaggerate when she speaks of the *bitternesses* and the *slights of the salon*. The "old-time courtiers had to make but one concession to Bonaparte, — merely that of changing masters." They did it the more zealously as they were less sincere and more selfish. Madame de Staël thwarted their evolutions, and compromised the effects of their recantations. But one would ill judge them to say that they attacked either her writings or her convictions. That would have been to take too seriously her character of muse and superior woman. Men of quality, and particularly women of the world, never troubled themselves about her supremacy even in jest. They had their own opinions of her. They attacked Madame de Staël on her vulnerable quarter, — her weak

spots, the annoyances of her life, her imprudences, her lack of tact, her noisily displayed sentiments, her thirst for success, her dancing, her turban, her circle of bright wits, her train of gallants, and the supposed prodigality of her favors. In order to annihilate the writer they outraged the woman.

In the midst of these events M. de Staël died. He had been regularly separated from his wife in 1798; he had always cherished the hope of recovering his embassy, and his wife's disgrace stood in the way. But he obtained nothing, after all. He was unhappy; he longed to see his children again. Madame de Staël decided to meet him at Coppet. On the way he died, in the month of May, 1802. Madame de Staël was free. Her passion for Benjamin Constant was a secret to no one, and every one declared that they would marry. Love in marriage, which had been the dream of her youth, was still the burden of her writings. "What! is it within the possibility of human things that such happiness should exist and yet earth know it not?" she writes in the book on "The Passions." "Is this union of things possible, and yet to get it for oneself impossible?"

But while she loved Benjamin Constant with a jealous ardor, while she could not endure the

idea of existence without him, and, above all, of seeing him belong to another, she hesitated very much to bind her life to his. She would have him to lean upon, but she could not make up her mind to have him for a master. There was nothing in him of the sublime protector, the strong and gentle guide, which was her ideal. She feared that Benjamin would disturb the life she had marked out for herself, without conferring the inner happiness which was yet unknown to her. She clung to her rank of ambassadress, to her title of baroness, and to that name which she had rendered celebrated. Benjamin, for his part, found more irksome than one could say his *rôle* of "perpetual gallant" to a woman so sought after. He throned it beside her, but he also occupied a somewhat equivocal position there. For some time he had endured with impatience "the supernatural influence" which she exercised over him; he was irritated by his own shameful flights and his capitulating returns. Weary of her, he longed for more commonplace loves, for the legitimate adoration of a docile wife, simple of heart, of limited intellect, but submissive. He imagined that in asking the hand of Madame de Staël he would provoke a refusal which would open a way of retreat. He asked it, but without urging;

she refused, but without giving occasion for a repetition; neither one cared for the union. And yet each bore the other a grudge, — she for not having been forced to consent, he for not having been taken at his word. They remained therefore painfully fixed in the interval between love and marriage; they were miserable, but they could not extricate themselves.

For Madame de Staël there remained one resource, — the consolation of those who are born with the pen in hand, — namely, to give to the world an account of their unjust sufferings and disgrace. She composed her romance of "Delphine," the most personal of her works, the one "in which she told everything," according to Madame Necker de Saussure, and in which she portrays "the reality of her youth." "Can a woman's talent have any other object than to be loved a little more?" she said at this time to a friend. To make herself more beloved, and to defend herself; to show to the world that it is iniquitous, and that she is not the dupe of its false judgments; and above all, to offer to all women who suffer the same ills the book announced in the treatise on "The Passions" and predicted in the treatise on "Literature," this romance of life and of the future, the book that should truly unveil un-

happiness, the book that should expose what others have always feared to represent,—the weaknesses, the miseries which follow in the train of great reverses, the *ennuis* which despair does not cure, the disgust which the heel of suffering cannot kill, the contrast of petty and of noble sorrows, and all those contrasts and all those inconsequences which combine only for evil and tear all at once the same heart by every sort of pain,—that is the aim of "Delphine;" the spirit of it is summed up in two lines by the epigraph: "A man should be able to brave opinion; a woman should submit to it."

It was an accusation of her own self apparently, but by means of one of those splendid confessions which is at the same time an apology. The heroine is *herself*, rejuvenated, beautiful, more graceful, more attractive, more refined, and disassociated both from politics and literature. Delphine has but one adventure, and in this the heart alone is at stake. As to the hero, Léonce, he is again and always a veiled image of Guibert. Madame de Staël does not trouble herself to invent a Werther or a Saint-Preux. The new passions disenthralled by the Revolution and nourished by war do not inspire her. The amorous Jacobin, the romantic warrior, the exile, the conspirator,—all the types common to the

romance of the morrow are strangers to her imagination. She paints what has attracted herself, but in idealizing his person she does not make him more sympathetic. She adorns him with every seductive trait, and ascribes to him all the prejudices of the man of the world. But he speaks with more passionateness than he feels; he promises a happiness that he is incapable of giving. He is haughty, jealous, susceptible, sceptical, excepting on the point of honor, where he is finical, and on the matter of opinion, — that is to say, tittle-tattle, — where he is pusillanimous. He adores Delphine, who is noble, rich, virtuous, and he marries another woman because his mother has so ordered for him. He places Delphine above all other women, and at the same time he believes all the calumnies which the world lays at her door. She justifies herself; he forgives, he repents, but he refuses to marry her by means of a divorce, because divorce is in bad taste. He offers her a compromise which he thinks will conciliate every one, — the world, love, and the conventionalities; he will elope with her, and go to live with her in a foreign land. Léonce is real, but he is intolerable. "He has no love," says a friend of Delphine; "all the evil is the result of that." That is his condemnation.

Delphine is imprudent without premeditation, and the chance is too disastrous for her. Yet the episodes of the novel, in spite of their monotony, are interesting. They are such things as happen, but only in a *salon*. There is no thought of the frame, the costume, or the coloring. The romance unfolds between the years 1790 and 1792; apart, however, from the arrest of Léonce, wrongly accused of bearing arms against France and finally shot, there is nothing to indicate the Revolution in this book, save some fine phrases on liberty, patriotism, and the duties of a good Frenchman. The secondary characters are lifelike. Some have been pleased to see in them several of Madame de Staël's personal friends. They are, however, much involved and disguised, and it is misspent curiosity to look for their models. Perhaps we may except Madame de Vernon, the compelling impulse of Delphine's life, who practises religion without believing in it and obeys prejudices while disapproving them. We may recognize Talleyrand in this very politic character. Indeed, there are several traces of the old bishop; among others, this one, — the only revenge for her old friend's defection which Madame de Staël allowed herself, — "Ingratitude," says Madame de Vernon, "is a great word, much abused. We use it

because we delight in it, and when we have no more pleasure in it we use it no more. We do nothing in life but by calculation or taste. I do not see what gratitude can have to do either with the one or the other."

Delphine is a literary romance, — "a class," says the author, "which presupposes more sentiments than acts." In the order of sentiments Madame de Staël lays too great stress on despair. One feels that she is herself given to these effusions, that she dotes on them, too often adding to them rather than concealing or controlling them. What we have in her own letters on the same subject is more concise and plainer; her own passion carries away the pen, and leaves it no time for dissertation. Madame de Staël weakens her inspiration in diffusing it; but the inspiration is genuine. For pathos and ardor some of Delphine's letters deserve to be compared with those of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. Madame de Staël did not see these letters until 1809; therefore she could not have imitated them. But the tone is the same, and when the letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse appeared all the world was struck by it. There is the same ecstasy of love, the same heart-rending cry out of the same depths of woe, the same regrets in the sacrifice, and finally, to use a figure dear to

the author, the same "vulture's claw" which tears the heart when it grasps it in order to bear it away to heaven.

The style of "Delphine" seems old, — that is, it seems to have once been young, — and that is also why it touched its contemporaries. The pedantic critic — and the critic in those times was narrowly pedantic — brought to light many a defect in this romance. Roederer, formerly so friendly, became severe in proportion as the consular disgrace spread around Madame de Staël. He hardly forgave her for making so much stir, and for hitting so keenly what he, with all his excellent theories, had only succeeded in hitting so lamely, without warmth or brilliance. He accused Madame de Staël of having no continuity or depth of ideas, of employing elliptical turns and abstract expressions, of not seeking the exact word, the significant verb, or of not finding when she sought it. He says to her, "It is the expression which creates and fixes the thought." He sends her to Condillac; and it was a good school, in truth. She replies to him, "What do we understand by style? Is it not the coloring and movement of ideas? Do you mean that I lack eloquence, imagination, or sensibility?"

She made her rhetoric to suit her own gen-

ius, which was of the nature of improvisation: "The style represents to the reader, so to speak, the bearing, the accent, the gestures of the one who addresses him." This is what she calls the style of soul and enthusiasm; in a word, written ecstasy. She makes a note of whatever in her thoughts can be noted; she never reproduces that which exactly pertains to style in her own discourses, — namely, the whirlwind of her eloquence, the sparkle of her superb eyes, her imperious accents, her persuasive gestures. She never troubles herself enough to supply these by means of the art of writing. She has movement, but she lacks color. I do not refer to color applied with a brush, but to natural color, to those spontaneous metaphors of language which animate a phrase as the flush of young blood animates the face.

The purpose of Madame de Staël is to convince by rapidity of argument and to produce emotion by driving home to the heart. She does not try to paint. She said in relation to Montesquieu, who, to her mind, multiplied his figures too much: "In place of this figure, one dares to long for a thought of Tacitus or of the author himself, who oftentimes surpassed the best writers of antiquity." Shall we pause over her adjectives? The adjective is a matter of literary fashion and caprice. It will be the

venture of a book to-morrow, while it makes the charm of one to-day and was the ridicule of another yesterday. We have some that we abuse, and some that we caress, — as, *Parisian, delicate, modern;* we have some that are ill-favored, — as, *psychological.* In the days of Madame de Staël *sensible* (sensitive or susceptible) was still the rage. She employs it on all occasions, in its proper sense, which nevertheless makes us smile, — as, "to be the first object of a *sensible* man;" and then in all its phases of abuse, — as, "his eloquence . . . *sensible* as his heart," "an air [of music] at once lively and *sensible*," — and this last in a translation from the English to render the word *suave* (sweet), which would have been well and good in its place.

Her contemporaries did not perceive this; all the *sensible* souls of her time wept over "Delphine," and the author's enemies raged at the success of the book. Even the "master" uttered his word upon it. "The disorder of mind and imagination which rules this book excited his criticism," says the "Memorial." This gave the sign. The bureaucracy vied with one another in refinements on this theme. One journal announced facetiously a "converted Delphine." Madame de Genlis, in the fervor of newly acquired virtue, accused the

author of corrupting morals. Fiévée depicted Madame de Staël as an old gossip seized with an excess of activity, "astride the sublime." "Delphine," he says, "talks of love like a bacchante, of God like a Quaker, of death like a grenadier, and of morals like a sophist."

These were so many warnings not to risk herself in France. Madame de Staël could not resign herself to believe in them. In the autumn of 1803 she set out for Paris. Her presence was heralded; she was the recipient of some rather blustering visits. In spite of the friendship of Madame Récamier, who was still in favor, and in spite of the intervention of Joseph Bonaparte, she received, October 15, the order to withdraw forty leagues distant from the capital, — to Dijon, if she pleased. She preferred to travel. She had thought of this already, when her exile was announced. "Always a little romantic, even in friendship," as she said, she wrote to Camille Jordan in 1802 to accompany her to Italy. "To forget all that has weighed upon me for the last six months, to forget with you, whom I love deeply, beneath the beautiful skies of Italy, — together to admire the remains of a great people, to pour forth our tears upon those who succumbed before reaching true great-

ness, — that would make me happy." Camille, who was romantic only in his politics, declined the invitation. Madame de Staël gave up the project and turned toward Germany. She thought that this journey might be beneficial to her elder son. Germany attracted her. She desired, according to the words of one of her friends, " to go and see for herself those great geniuses," Goethe and Schiller, then at the height of their glory. She had a secret motive behind all this, — " I wished to contrast the friendly reception of the ancient dynasties with the impertinence of him who was preparing to subjugate France." She departed with her children in December, 1803; visited Charles de Villers at Metz, — " Kant's Villers," as he was called, — who laid out an itinerary for her; then she proceeded by way of Frankfort to Weimar, where Benjamin Constant rejoined her in January.

CHAPTER IV.

JOURNEYS TO GERMANY AND ITALY.—"CORINNE."

1804–1807.

SHE attained her end. She wandered through the land of enthusiasm; she became acquainted with the "great geniuses;" she was treated by princes as an illustrious victim, and she provided the agents of Napoleon with material for reports wherewith they curried the favor of their master while irritating him with the recital of his enemy's successes.

Weimar was hardly a State; it was a court and a theatre. Goethe ruled the theatre, and Schiller was the ornament of the court. Here was hardly the constitution dreamt of by Madame de Staël; but intellect compensated for whatever was lacking in the institutions. Yet this was for a long time as a closed book to her. In spite of the attractions which both heart and imagination promised her, in spite of a something Germanic which she seemed to have inherited from her ancestors, — a race affinity which Goethe noted at once and which

predisposed her intuitively to Germany in general, — the sense of the words fell short of her, and, further still, the sentiment of things. She was not satisfied to have the phrases translated to her, or to translate them herself; in substituting the French term for the German she seemed to substitute with it the ideas and images born in the mind of a Parisian accustomed to the high life of the old *régime*, for the ideas and images which contemplation of Nature and a life at once very meditative and very studious had developed in Goethe, Schiller, and their contemporaries. It was an entirely different conception of humanity, of love, of woman's place in the world, and of woman's destiny.

Their dissentient opinions clashed still more. As to the Revolution, the Germans pronounced it distorted by its authors; as to Bonaparte, they considered the First Consul the very personification of the practical and legitimate outcome of the Revolution; as to liberty, they denied to the French even the understanding of the word; and as to morality, they almost contested their very consciousness of it. "Madame de Staël has no notion whatever of duty," said Goethe, after having read "Delphine" and the treatise on "The Passions." These Germans cared little for the establishment of a free State

and the promulgation of laws fit to form virtuous citizens. Liberty for them consisted in the independent development of the intelligence, and virtue in the wholesome self-control of the soul. Liberty and virtue, conceived in this sort, were each one's private affair; character was everything with them, institutions nothing. Public affairs were the affairs of the State, and did not concern these *savants* and poets. To obey the powers that be so as to have leisure to think freely in the tribunal of the mind, — this was their plan of life, and they saw in it no contradiction. "They are energetic flatterers," said Madame de Staël, "and vigorously submissive, . . . employing philosophical reasoning to explain the most unphilosophical thing in the world, — respect for might."

They expected to see in her a phenomenon, and surrounded her with prejudices which her character did not tend to diminish. Her best qualities, her greatest charms, her sparkling conversation, her eloquence, her marvellous suppleness of mind, lost much in intercourse with foreigners. They not only were not in touch, but in order to reach and maintain that relation, they had to exert a continual effort of attention, to suffer an embarrassment which paralyzed their thoughts. "If she only under-

stands German," wrote Schiller, "we shall get the upper hand; but if we must offer our deepest religion in French phrases and struggle with French volubility, that will be really too hard." That volubility which dazzled Paris very nearly bewildered Weimar. Moreover, they had their own habits, methods, work, hours of relaxation and of reflection, — a regularly laid out life of thinkers, — which they disliked to see disturbed by this meteor.

With her insatiable desire to spread her ideas, her impatient curiosity concerning the ideas of others, Madame de Staël wanted to fill every moment. She could not believe that others did not take at all the same interest in her discourse that she did herself. She endeavored to explain Germany, its genius and literature, by the men who understood French but imperfectly, or who, like Goethe, knew it, but spoke it with difficulty. Nothing was farther from their conception of intellectual life than this pretence of learning everything by intercourse in which she did most of the talking, and the reduction of everything through the medium of conversation. "I understand everything worth understanding, and what I do not comprehend has no existence," she said to a friend who served as her interpreter, and who declared that she would never under-

stand Goethe. In regard to this great poet in particular she had an added fear of being mystified and of being duped. She was always on guard before him. He was absent from Weimar when Madame de Staël arrived, and he had to be much coaxed to return.

The effect which Madame de Staël produced on the court and city of Weimar has been compared to the invasion of an ant-hill by a squirrel. She was immediately invited to the palace, and there treated on an intimate footing. Perhaps it was there that she was most indulged. She met Schiller there for the first time at tea with the Duchess. He was in the uniform of the court; she took him for a general. He was presented to her, and she straightway drew him into conversation on the superiority of French tragedy. It was one of her favorite themes, and her talent for declamation furnished her with the best of arguments. The Germans gladly heard her recitations and applauded her; but she did not at all convert them to the worship of Racine. She compelled admiration, but she fatigued. "She is all of a piece," wrote Schiller; "there is nothing false or sickly in her, — which has the result that in spite of the enormous difference in nature and manner of thought, one is perfectly at ease with her; one can understand all she

wishes to convey, and can say anything to her. She represents French culture in all its entirety; nature and sentiment go for more with her than metaphysics, and her fine intellect rises to the power of genius. . . . As to what we call poetry, she has no idea of it; she cannot apprehend in works of that kind the passionate, oratorical, universal qualities." Then followed certain reservations: "The astonishing volubility of her speech: one must be all ears to follow her. . . . She desires to explain, to penetrate, to measure everything; she admits of nothing obscure or inaccessible; and where she cannot flash the light of her own torch, nothing exists for her." "We are in a state of perpetual mental tension," adds Charlotte Schiller; "when one wishes to collect oneself one must go back over the subjects, look for the traces, and gather up one's wits. It is perpetual motion; she wishes to know and see everything."

And all this by chance and in the current of the improvisations of the table or the *salon*, broaching by preference the most insolvable problems, the great mysteries of the soul and of passion, which, said Goethe, "should never be questioned except between God and man;" discussing and deciding them with a fine emotion or a clear eloquence, always in haste to

get to the end of it, always ready to put the same question to-morrow and to begin over again. She shocked these men of slower and more sustained thought, who were forever discussing and never coming to any conclusions. She demanded that they should produce their machinery, analyze themselves, explain themselves and their works on the wing, so to speak, and at first sight. Schiller lost his patience. "I seem to myself to be recovering from an illness," he said when she went away.

Finding herself one day in company with Fichte, she said to him, "Tell me, M. Fichte, could you in a very short time, in a quarter of an hour for example, give me an epitome of your system, and explain to me what you mean by your word *me?* It is very obscure to me." Fichte had spent all his life in hatching this word and evolving its surprising metamorphoses. The question seemed to him impertinent. Nevertheless, he was gallant enough to endeavor to please her. But he had to translate himself into French, and the effort almost caused him a bloody sweat. He had not spoken ten minutes, when Madame de Staël cried out: "Enough, M. Fichte, quite enough! I understand you marvellously well. I have seen your system in an illustration; it is one of the adventures of Baron Münchausen."

The philosopher struck a tragic attitude, and a great chill fell upon the whole assembly.

This is an example of the grounds on which the Germans denied her intelligence; she, on her part, denied them any knowledge of the life of the world: "There is no shade of comparison between what we call society in France and this. And I am not surprised that in Germany *savants* have more time for study than anywhere else, for the attractions of society have no existence there." Time, which she held so cheaply and which she was always in such haste to get rid of, was to her hosts the most precious thing in life. She robbed them of some of it, and this was what made her most annoying to them.

Goethe seemed to her just about as Benjamin Constant has described him at that epoch, — having "shrewdness, self-esteem, physical irritability that amounts to torment, a remarkable presence, a keen glance, a coarse and ignoble face;" Werther grown fat, and the crow's-foot planted on the temples of that Olympian head! This was a disappointment. "I would like to put his mind into another body," she wrote; "it is inconceivable that so superior a mind should be so ill lodged." She said to him, "I should like to steal from you all that can be stolen; that would leave

you still very rich." As he shrank back, she continued, "If I were to establish myself here, you might do well to treat me like all the world; but fifteen days — could you not devote so much time to me?" This was demanding the thing of which Goethe was least prodigal; he made use of his genius as he made use of all earthly powers, and he economized it.

In the month of March she left Weimar for Berlin. This "focus of lights" charmed her by the spirit of justice which she saw in the State, and the independence of character which she observed in individuals. It seemed to her, however, that the famous "Spur of Prussia," the nation's great mainspring, was becoming sensibly dull, that he spent too much time in military parades and diplomatic affairs. She obtained as tutor for her sons Wilhelm Schlegel. He became her principal interpreter of German ideas, and helped her to assimilate what she had been gathering by the way. It was at Berlin that she learned of the conspiracy of Georges and the murder of the Duc d'Enghien. In her memoirs she lays the conspiracy to Fauriel; she brings in too many police and too few assassins. She passes judgment like a historian and a politician on the affairs of Vincennes; she knew perfectly well the men whom Bonaparte meant to strike by

this terrible example: "The moment that he desired to be called emperor he felt the necessity of reassuring, on the one hand, the revolutionaries against the possibility of the return of the Bourbons, and of proving, on the other hand, to the royalists that in attaching themselves to him they broke from the ancient dynasty forever."

The arrest of a prince at Ettenheim did not leave her without personal uneasiness. This idea carried her back toward Coppet; and the worst blow she could experience finally recalled her there. She learned that her father was seriously ill; she departed hastily and found him dead. He had succumbed on the 10th of April. Madame de Staël now experienced a grief worse than all the sufferings of love, in the loss of the person who even in those sufferings offered her the truest consolation. "While my father lived I suffered only in imagination; . . . after his loss I had to deal with fate directly and alone."

She set herself valiantly to the work. As a zealous mother she was already interested in the education of her children, and she occupied herself about their fortune with a provident eye to their future. She seemed in this latter work, which was so repugnant to her taste, to be inspired by the thought of her

father; and she gave him the worshipful praise which she had felt for him from her childhood.

About the same time and under the same influence she began to feel some religious emotion in her soul. She had always recognized the social necessity of faith, and she now felt the personal need of it and a desire for its support. She spent the entire summer in composing the eulogy entitled "The Character and Private Life of M. Necker." It is a sincere and touching effort, a more personal version of the first part of the "Considerations." Then, when life became too difficult for her at Coppet, she tried a new diversion, and set out in November for Italy.

Benjamin Constant had felt himself compelled to go to her in her calamity; he never knew to what extent he deceived her in so apparently pitying her and weeping with her. Most certainly he saw her depart from Coppet with a light heart, and never thought of following her. She would like to have taken Camille Jordan with her: "You will not be alone with me, for I have my three children and their excellent tutor. You will do an act of charity to one whose soul is cruelly wounded." But Camille feared shipwreck. He loved not sea and tempest save at a safe distance, say from the

observatory of Lucrece; and this time, as before, he stayed at home.

A voyage without company — that is to say, without conversation — seemed to Madame de Staël "one of the saddest pleasures in life." "To travel over unknown countries, to hear a language of which we understand little, to see human faces that have no relation to your past or to your future, is solitude and isolation without peace or dignity; for this haste to arrive where none awaits you, this agitation which has curiosity as its sole cause, inspires you with little self-respect." Goethe thought her incapable of comprehending Italy. He was mistaken; but his conversations, which the sight of the objects recalled to Madame de Staël, contributed singularly to open her eyes to them. Sismondi, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Bonstetten, whom she met, served her as interpreters of the past, and explained to her its great souls. At Milan she established with the sombre and stormy poet Monti one of those exalted friendships which in her discourses and letters so easily took the name of love. She visited the Countess of Albany. The Queen of Naples, Maria Carolina of Austria, gave her a reception which ought greatly to have flattered her. She had more reason for being gratified with the solemn reception offered

her at the Capitol by the Academy of Arcadians; she listened to a Latin sonnet composed in her honor, and read with emotion a translation, somewhat mediocre to be sure, which she made in French verse of a sonnet on the death of Jesus Christ by Minzoni.

This journey was a revelation of Nature to her to a degree in which she could feel its beauties. "One sees the sea and Vesuvius, and one forgets then all one knows of men," says Corinne; and Corinne is in her proper *rôle*. But Madame de Staël on her part had rather less enthusiasm for it. "If it were not a simple human duty," she confessed to a friend, "I would not open my window for a first view of the Bay of Naples half as soon as I would travel five hundred leagues to talk with a clever man whom I do not know." She did not go about Italy, like Chateaubriand, looking for imagery; what she brought back was only got at second hand, conjured at command and cut out in relief without light and shade. She preferred to simple Nature what she called the historic lands. Italy charmed her with its ruins and the magnificent setting she provided for the tragedies of the soul. The Italians interested but did not charm her. She noted the ease of their customs, the facility with which among them one gains entrance to the

world, leaves, re-enters, becomes known, and is forgotten in turn; agreeable customs for the passions, and natural in a country where they think of nothing but love. But, she observes, though they are always thinking of love, they reflect upon it but rarely, and they practise it too sincerely to find pleasure in analyzing it. She finds in this nation a combination of simplicity and corruption, of dissimulation and frankness, of kindness and cruelty, of weakness of character and strength of passion; nothing is done for vanity's sake, and much for interest. It seemed to her, however, that the genius of a great people brooded over this country, and she longed to behold its awakening.

She returned to Coppet in June, 1805. She was thirty-nine years of age; youth had fled, and Paris was closed to her. To remind herself of the life which she loved so wildly and which seemed to get on so easily without her, to recover possession of herself at this turn of life from which she felt herself about to be hurled, and where nothing remains for women but "sad regrets for the days when they were beloved," she wrote "Corinne." For a setting she gave it England, which she had visited twelve years previously, and Italy, from which she had just returned; for subject, the eternal problem of the destiny of women of genius,

the contrasts of glory and love; for a heroine herself carried to sublime heights, but always recognizable by her beautiful arms, her imposing figure, her inspired brow, her flashing eyes, her hair of the most beautiful black "intertwined with an Indian *schall* or scarf wound about her head," by the irresistible outbursts of her heart, and by the enchanting flow of her speech. It is indeed herself; and she is all there, even to the dress and the turban. She adds what she herself lacks, — beauty of face and the charm of mystery. She knows too well what a woman compromises and loses in descending from her Olympus.

Corinne is "a divinity enveloped in clouds, . . . a woman of whom everybody is speaking and whose real name no one knows." She seeks not renown, "save to have one more charm in the eyes of him whom she loves." She makes for herself a life without and above the world, yet she dreads the world; "she trembles at the idea" that the man she loves "may immolate others and himself on the altar of opinion." She aspires to happiness in love. If she needs "a theatre where she may rise to her full height," it is because her fate wills that she should be loved only amid the triumphs of the stage. Madame de Staël thus criticises, excuses, and glorifies in her heroine the ro-

mantic and poetic side of her own character. Corinne is nowhere so noble and so touching as during her sad journey through England, when she follows the man who has taken possession of her heart, and drags herself in his footsteps amid the grief of abandonment. One concludes of the author as the heroine concludes of herself: "I examine myself sometimes as a stranger might do, and I pity myself. I was once spiritual, true, good, generous, *sensible;* why do all these so easily turn to evil? Is the world really bad? And do these take away our defences in certain qualities instead of giving us strength?"

In the hero of the romance, Nelvil, Madame de Staël presents herself again in a certain way, giving to him her moral views, her social qualities, the Necker side of her nature, and the more religious and conservative side of her mind. These also make up Nelvil's best side. The rest is mediocre. Madame de Staël betrays in him, as in Léonce, her inferior idea of men. She believes that a woman can never be happy save in adoring her master; she never found her own. She had met with but one ruler of souls, and in him she detested the tyrant of her life. The men whom she knew were all nervous, effeminate, *roués*, sceptics, weak, or ungrateful. Oswald, Lord Nelvil, a peer of

Scotland, is a prey to spleen and threatened with phthisis. "At twenty-five he was discouraged with life, his spirit divined everything in advance, and his wounded sensibilities took no more pleasure in the heart's illusions. He hoped to find in the strict devotion to his duties and in the renunciation of lively pleasures a safeguard against the sorrows that rend the soul." He appears enveloped in a voluminous, dark, floating cloak, which is the masculine equivalent of Corinne's turban. He seems imposing and haughty because of his shy reserve. He is especially irresolute; he hates "irrevocable matters." "Always honest, always profound and passionate, he is nevertheless always ready to renounce the object of his affections, . . . to exchange the vague dreams of romantic happiness for the satisfactions of the real blessings of life, independence, and security;" add to this a blond wife, obedient and rich, a seat in Parliament, and a position in the great world. The slave of cant, submissive to his father, as was Léonce to the opinion and caprice of his mother. Otherwise very English, as Léonce was very French. Léonce, a thorough gentleman, pushes his respect for conventionalities to the length of proposing to run away with Delphine and make her his mistress, rather than marry her by means of a

divorce. Nelvil abandons Corinne, whom he will neither seduce nor marry; but he professes to think that "even infidelity is more moral in England than marriage in Italy." Léonce was half a fool; Nelvil was half a snob. Both are insipid and have no idea of loving.

The secondary personages in "Corinne" are entirely original, particularly the English. The pictures of the province and the society amid which Nelvil lives are still vivid. The two Frenchmen in the book are drawn from the first exiles,—one, D'Erfeuil, lively and practical, the reasoner of the drama, who holds that love passes away, blame remains, and that there are no faults that are not pardonable except lack of tact and conformity; the other, Raimond, Philinte in exile, in whom we seem to recognize the generous soul of Mathieu de Montmorency.

"Corinne" is a complex work. The romance unfolds amid the incidents of a journey, and the study of sentiments is mingled with meditations on history. We prefer nowadays a more definite treatment of subject. Stendhal has set the example by a division of his studies of Italy. He has thrown his passions into a romance entitled "La Chartreuse de Parme;" and his reflections on history and art into a collection of notes called "Promenades about

Rome." In Madame de Staël's time the mixed character of "Corinne" was an added attraction. Otherwise the composition of the work is stronger and the connection is closer than in "Delphine." We must make allowance for the tone of the discourses; it was in the fashion, which does not regulate merely our costumes. The expressions seem to us emphatic; the acts and sentiments are natural. The dissertations do not interrupt the narrative, excepting in the case of the study, *à la* Montesquieu, of the government of Venice; it comes in the midst of the most pathetic crisis, and there is but one reason for it, — the author had written her piece and could find no other place to put it. The very numerous passionate scenes are better written than those in "Delphine." But one is disconcerted by the superabundance of apostrophes, and too often brought to a halt by the author's moral reflections. These were in her time, however, the ornaments and illustrations of the romance. They formed its charm, and they are neither more misplaced nor more disproportioned in "Corinne" than are, in the romances of to-day, the descriptions of any number of things which are unimportant to the scene, or the landscapes which the hero never looks at. The heroes of romance in 1805 carried about with them

a philosopher who reasoned out all their adventures. The heroes of to-day carry about a troup of parasites, who because they discourse upon something else besides morals are not on that account less tiresome or more entertaining.

"Oswald," says Corinne to her friend, "you do not love the arts for themselves, but merely for the sake of their relations with sentiment or intellect." Here speaks Goethe by the mouth of Corinne. Madame de Staël thinks like Nelvil, and writes as he thinks. Her descriptions are sober, with an effort at insight and without picturesqueness. They are the reverse of Chateaubriand's. Nothing marks more plainly the scope and the limitations of the genius of these two writers than the comparison of the two pictures of "Corinne" and the "Martyrs," or, better still, of the "Lettres à Fontanes." Chateaubriand is everywhere visible. His first object is to make his presence known; the second, to spread over all the riches of his palette. If he meditates upon the destiny of bygone empires, it is to show the surprising relation between the ruin of the greatest things in the world and the inevitable annihilation of his own person. Madame de Staël's heroes consider the world from a higher plane, they look farther away; they see objects with less relief and color, but they reflect, as

it were within their souls, upon the burdens of souls that have passed away, and they are filled with a great pity for the world in contemplation of life's great decay.

"Rome sleeps amid her ruins," writes Chateaubriand. "That star of night, that orb which we suppose to be a world that is dead and unpeopled, takes its pale course in solitude above the solitudes of Rome. It lights the uninhabited streets, enclosures, squares, and gardens where no one passes; the monasteries where one hears no more the voice of the monks; the cloisters which are as deserted as the portals of the Coliseum." This is the voice of René; now listen to Corinne: "Even the degradation of this Roman people is imposing still. Her mourning for liberty covers the world with marvels; and the genius of ideal beauty seeks to console man for the material, visible dignity which he has lost." Chateaubriand is present at the service of the *Ténèbres* at the Sistine Chapel. "Were you not there with me?" he writes to a lady whom he loves in a profane sense. "I love even the wax lights which, when the flame was extinguished, exhaled a white smoke, — symbol of a life suddenly gone out. Rome is a beautiful place in which to forget, to ignore, to die." Madame de Staël comforts herself in another way

on the same themes, and lifts her heart toward the hope of another life: "The last piece leaves in the depths of the soul a sweet and pure impression. May God grant us this same impression before we come to die! . . . When the last sound has died away, all take their departure slowly and noiselessly; each seems to dread to re-enter into the vulgar interests of this world. . . . If we are passing through this world toward heaven, what better can we do than lift up our souls, so that they may catch a breath of the infinite, the invisible, and the eternal amid all the limitations that hedge us in?"

Madame de Staël is an emotional thinker; Chateaubriand is a marvellous artist. The poems which Madame de Staël gives us as the works of Corinne have something foreign about them; this cold and abstract prose has the air of translation. Nothing of Corinne's recalls even faintly the beautiful *cantilène* of Cymodocée: "Swift ships of Ausonie, cleave the calm and brilliant sea." Even the most beautiful passages seem to be at second-hand:

"Do you know the land where the orange-trees bloom, and which the heaven's rays fecundate with love? Have you heard the melodious sounds which chant the sweetness of the nights? Have you breathed

those perfumes, the luxury of the air already so sweet and so pure? Answer, strangers! is Nature with you so beautiful and kind?"

There is movement here; but it is a movement of Goethe, and the imitation is plainly seen. "I feel myself a poet," says Corinne, "not only when a happy choice of rhymes or harmonious syllables or a happy combination of images dazzles the hearers, but when my soul rises, and when from those heights it disdains egoism and baseness, and when indeed a fine action becomes easier to me." The "harmonious syllables" and the images were left behind in Corinne's Italian manuscript. We have only the ecstasies, which are the property of Madame de Staël. This especially appears in the conversations. Then the author herself speaks. The colloquies upon Italian literature in Book VII., on poetry in Book III., on the tombs in Book IV., and the walks about Rome, give one, perhaps, according to her contemporaries, the best idea of the conversations of Madame de Staël.

"Corinne" stands in literature not as a masterpiece, — there is too great length of narrative, too much of fashion in the style, — but as a fine example of poetic genius such as it was conceived of in those days. "Corinne"

was, to a whole generation of generous, romantic, and passionate men and women, the book of love and of the ideal. It was a revelation of Italy to many French people. It made Italy for years the land of lovers and the cherished end of all voyages of happiness.

The book was completed in France. Napoleon was at war with Germany. Fouché, more sceptical and more hardened than his master, took women's acts less seriously, and persisted in believing Madame de Staël a virago more malignant afar than near. He allowed her to advance to Auxerre in April, 1806. She was seen wandering outside Paris, restless and flitting, but always indiscreet and never out of view. She approached as near as Cernay, which she bought for the purpose of establishing herself there, and ventured under an *incognito* even into Paris. Her appearance was made known to the Emperor, and he found time to be angry about it. "This woman is like a crow," he wrote to Fouché in May, 1807. "She thought the tempest had already come and feasted herself on intrigues and follies. . . . Let her go back to her own Leman," or else "I will put her under the orders of the *gendarmerie*, and then I shall be sure that she will not return with impunity to Paris." Madame de Staël beat a retreat step by step,

always hoping against hope for a return of fortune. While she was on her way to Switzerland, "Corinne" appeared. Its success was immense and was echoed over Europe. Madame de Staël returned to Coppet covered with glory. Exile being apparently unavoidable, she took pains to make it heard of, and, like Voltaire at Ferney aforetime, to blind her persecutors by its brilliancy.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT COPPET. — THE BOOK ON GERMANY. — THE CENSOR AND THE POLICE. — M. DE ROCCA. — THE FLIGHT.

1806–1812.

THIS is the epoch consecrated to Coppet; and considering that these were years of exile, they were nevertheless not years either of isolation or of mourning. Numbers of distinguished persons made the journey thither to admire Corinne, to listen to her and compassionate her. None passed through Switzerland without stopping either at Coppet or Ouchy, where she dwelt by turns. Among those who appeared there were Augustus of Prussia and the Duchess of Courlande; Madame Récamier and her court of adorers; among the more intimate, Prosper de Barante, Mathieu de Montmorency, Elzéar de Sabran, and le Baron de Voght; a Russian, M. de Balk, whose "oriental imagination and evangelical wings" Madame de Staël admired, and whom she loved "with a friendship so tender that she thought it supernatural;" Zacharias Werner, "the apostle and professor of love;" Monti, who,

à l'Italienne, exercised the same apostleship; Sismondi and Bonstetten; young Guizot, who was merely a passer-by, but made a deep impression by his beautiful voice in reciting by heart the philippics of Chateaubriand: "It is in vain that Nero prospers; Tacitus is already born to the empire!" and lastly, Schlegel, the intellectual factotum of the household, and Benjamin Constant, the capricious tenor of this rare company of intellectual artists.

Madame de Staël made a great effort to keep them all in harmony and to make each one do his part in the concert. The task was not an easy one; they were rivals at all points, and Corinne's favor must be most delicately bestowed. Benjamin detested Schlegel; in his notes he makes him out a grotesque and vulgar German pedant. Schlegel had a contempt for Benjamin, and looked askance at Sismondi, who in turn considered him a fool. Madame de Staël showed herself full of solicitude for them; she flattered them, sought opportunity to make them shine, and soothed their wounded vanities. But whether they would or no, they must contribute to amuse her, must be always ready with a reply, must be always ready to talk, and always disposed at any hour to strike off sparks. She was kind but exacting, imperious and absorbing, like

Bonaparte, in her attachments and her tastes; monopolizing even misfortunes, — "the ambassadress who engrosses everything," said one contemporary. They began to talk in the morning at eleven-o'clock breakfast; they resumed at dinner, then in the garden or while taking a carriage-drive; again between dinner and supper, "entre chien et loup," then at supper, finally at eleven o'clock, and continued far into the night. Sismondi, who was otherwise much fascinated, came away "stunned by these everlasting passages at arms."

As at Weimar, though on a much smaller stage, the theatre occupied the principal place in this little court. Madame de Staël enjoyed this. Said one of her adorers: "She is a tragedy character; she must receive and dispense crowns." Her performance was uneven, dependent upon inspiration, but singularly poignant and pathetic. "The harmony of verse," she says, "the charm of attitude, lend to passion what it lacks in reality, dignity and grace." In appearing in her favorite characters, Mérope, Andromaque, Zaïre, Alzire, Hermione, Phèdre, she appeared "august and unfortunate," and seemed to say with Corinne, "Behold, how I am capable of loving!" She wrote "Hagar" and the "Shunamite," which she played with her daughter and melted the

gallery to tears. Her friends wrote and declaimed tragedies. Guizot here made his *début.* Benjamin Constant aspired to be the first person in this illustrious theatre; and of all the objects of his life this perhaps seriously occupied him the longest.

His *liaison* with Madame de Staël became more and more stormy, and he seemed to grow more and more enervated by it. In 1804 during the journey to Germany, and in 1805 during that to Italy, he had intended to break it off. Yet he returned again and again; scarcely once more returned than he was seized with the longing for flight. Madame de Staël was approaching the sharp crisis of the heart. Benjamin suffered her "monotonous lamentations, not for things real, but for the general laws of Nature and old age." She fought against age; he mocked at it. He sent this woman, who was terrified by love's neglect, to her own treatise on "The Passions," which she had never realized as being more than a rhetorical play. "What can others do against your contrary desires?" said he to her. "You will not suffer, yet you spread your wings; you are determined to brave the winds, you run against the trees, you bruise yourself against the rocks. I can do nothing for you, alas! Until you furl your sails there is no

hope for you!" He could indeed do nothing. He loved her no longer. He flew into a passion under this reproach: "Love after ten years of association, when I have already sworn two hundred times that it no longer exists!" There ensued "some frightful scenes." She wrote to Benjamin "such letters as one would not write even to a highway assassin." He spoke of her in his private notes in terms which outdid by a great length the barrack diatribes of Napoleon.

Benjamin, out of the scorn of his own absurd conduct, obtained a stimulus for his vanity; he flayed himself alive, and painted himself, dissected and desiccated, as "Adolphe." Meanwhile during his sprees in Paris he busied himself with "raising up a fallen daughter," or, as he says, "a child of the demi-monde," who was an admirer of Jean Jacques and made pilgrimages to Ermenonville. He plans to marry every young person who crosses his pathway. He longs for a "pure marriage;" and this wish leads him to the feet of a German, Charlotte de Hardenberg, divorced from her first husband, united in left-handed marriage to a second, having a gay reputation, and whose advances he regrets having heretofore neglected. He finds her apathetic, and this apathy is charming by contrast. Madame de Staël knows nothing about it, but suspects. She writes to him

"It is the crash of the universe and chaos in motion," says Benjamin. "All the volcanoes put together are less inflammable than this woman. . . . I am tired of this man-woman whose iron hand has held me bound for the last ten years." He desired to marry Charlotte, but he dared not. Meanwhile he deceived her, and then abandoned her to return to Coppet, whither Madame de Staël recalled him. He arrived there fully determined to break with her. He told her so. She cried out that she "would pursue him to the ends of the earth, and that if he escaped her, she would kill herself." "Rather than lose him I would marry him." He remained, not knowing which of her threats he dreaded more, — marriage or suicide. In the evening they went before the audience and played together. The piece was "Andromaque." Benjamin was Pyrrhus. The part pleased him. "He is well pleased to play this part," writes his cousin Mademoiselle de Constant, and adds, "Never was 'Hermione' played with so much truth and fervor." When the curtain fell and the footlights were extinguished, the quarrels began again in the green-room.

They could neither tolerate each other nor separate, could neither marry nor dissolve. They made their friends by turns confidants in

their disagreements and spectators of the stage whereon they continued their quarrels under assumed characters. It was a tragic romance in high life; seeing them pass thus from drama to real life, one asks in which *rôle* they were more sincere, and which character really leads the piece, — that which one believes to be living, or that which one believes to be acted.

"We must submit," said Benjamin to himself; "it is the fate of the weak." And again, "She is very useful to me in my tragedy." He refers to a play of "Wallenstein" which he is imitating after Schiller, and in which he makes Madame de Staël help him. "Mon Dieu!" he adds finally, "only make one or the other depart!" Napoleon heard his prayer, and the police brought about the climax. The Emperor refused to authorize Madame de Staël's return to Paris. "Your mother," he said later to the young Auguste de Staël, who went to offer him a petition as he was passing through Chambéry, — "your mother would not be six months in Paris before I should be obliged to put her in Bicêtre or the Temple. She would do all sorts of rash things, she would see all the world, she would make a jest of everything; she would not think all this at all important, but I take everything seriously." For lack of anything better

Madame de Staël returned to Germany toward the close of 1807. She visited Munich and Vienna, of which she had previously known nothing. She revisited Weimar, which she found quite changed. The great geniuses had learned to admire Napoleon, and had discovered in him the man of destiny.

She came back in July, 1808. At Sécheron, near Geneva, she found Benjamin Constant awaiting her; he announced to her that he had been secretly married, and presented his wife to her. Madame de Staël was so beside herself with despair that she prevailed upon Charlotte and Benjamin to conceal their marriage. Charlotte in consternation yielded. Madame de Staël showed her plainly that she thought her very insipid to submit to the humiliation. Benjamin was ashamed of it; he thought he should have grown calmer by uniting himself to this apathetic being; but he concluded that wrath had its charms. Moreover his marriage gave his return to Madame de Staël a flavor of infidelity. He allowed himself to be carried off to Coppet, where he stayed; and Charlotte waited with the best grace she could command, for the return of her husband and the publication of their marriage. But this craze of Madame de Staël was to some degree only a matter of her imagination. Benjamin's

treason had not killed her. She found that she had really no desire to die. She found that she could live without Benjamin, and she only kept him out of pride, and to hold for herself the honors of war.

For a moment she thought of going to America, where she had certain interests. For this purpose she wrote a touching letter to Talleyrand in February, 1809. She appealed to his aid: "You wrote me fourteen years ago, 'If I stay here another year, I shall die here.' I may say as much of my sojourn abroad. I shall succumb under it. But the time for pity is past; necessity takes the place of it. . . . Half of my life is gone. . . . Are you happy? With your superior mind do you not go to the bottom of everything, even sorrow?" Talleyrand considered that the bottom of everything was an immense void, and he did not like to look into it. He professed a particular aversion to explanations; if he sent her any reply, no one knows of it. Madame de Staël found some distraction in publishing the memoirs of the Prince de Ligne, which she had brought home from Vienna. But this "whipped cream" could not long sustain her imagination. Her friends, who thought she exaggerated her complaints of exile, advised her, if she desired to find favor again, to make

use of the only advantage of her trials, — silence. "Do not write," they said; "what is the good of writing? After a few years you will be forgotten, and you will be as happy as though you had published nothing at all!"

This consolation was as intolerable as misfortune itself. Moreover, Madame de Staël's genius had matured singularly. The time was coming when the vocation to well-doing would replace that of being happy. The experience she had undergone on her return from Germany had led her even farther than she could have foreseen. She was at last freed from the yoke; she reconquered herself little by little. But as she had formerly found that her worst slavery was to herself, it was now outside of herself that she instinctively sought her enfranchisement.

Since the death of Necker, she had inclined toward the Christian religion. She now sought it by hard and stony, but direct paths. Formerly, when she had tried the wisdom of the ancients, she loved to repeat this phrase of Euripides: "It is useless to fret over things, for that will not better them." It was submission to fate; she was about to resign herself to the inscrutable designs of a just Providence. "We must take care that the decline of this life be the youth of the next,"

she said. "To give up self-interest without ceasing to be interested in others, puts a something divine into the soul." She turned to Heaven for the satisfaction of that thirst for justice with which she was possessed, and poured out upon humanity that power of loving which had kept her life in a vain ferment. She cast away, like a dry clod which is crushed to powder by a firm hand-grasp, the abstract and sterile philosophy by which she had been so long led far afield. She once professed to believe that nothing unintelligible existed. In her imperative need of peace and hope, and in the impossibility of finding these within herself, she came to feel that the extremes of the universe eluded the grasp of intelligence; that there are aspirations of the soul which even imagination cannot satisfy; that there is in man's spirit a reaching out toward the infinite which the spirit can neither suspend nor limit. She stifled the obstinate demands of judgment which would reduce everything to its own measurements. She heard nothing but the cry of her own heart. She said to herself that not only man's heart, but his whole soul "has reasons which reason itself knows nothing of." She listened to her Christian friends such as Mathieu de Montmorency, Gérando, and even the mystics, though to these latter she did not

yield herself; she read Fénelon, she devoured the "Imitation." She gave up trying to solve life's enigma. "I love the Lord's Prayer better," she said a little later, when some one spoke to her of metaphysics. She concluded that there was no philosophy but the Christian religion. If she had been logically led, she would have gone as far as Pascal; but Pascal would have carried her too far, to heights too barren and too icy, to mountain tops and abysses which had always terrified her soul. Her theory of exaltation gave place to the theory of morality, said a friend. Madame de Staël saw the mystery of existence, as a relationship between trial and fault. "I have never committed a wrong," she was wont to say, "which did not become the source of a misfortune." "Whatever effort one may make," she wrote, "one must return to the recognition of the fact that religion is the true basis of morals; it is the real and sensible object within ourselves, which can alone detach our gaze from exterior things. . . . The science of morals no more teaches how to be an honest man, in all the magnificence of the word, than geometry teaches to draw, or poetry to invent happily. . . . Mathematics leads one to take account only of what is proven; while primitive truths such as can be

grasped by feeling and spirit are not susceptible of demonstration." This is a faith that works, but questions not. Madame de Staël, like Necker once before, avoided "the study of miracles and mysteries." She made her own religion, only too glad to find in it her peace and consolation, — "a pietistic latitudinarianism," said the Duc Victor de Broglie.

This kind of conversion brought about great changes in her literary compositions and style of writing. Her works had been heretofore but her life's accessories; they were to become the principal object of it. She had sought in them a diversion in her exile; but it was still the world which she was pursuing even by this *détour*. Hereafter she felt herself more and more a stranger to the world, and she gave to her writings whatever in herself was least subject to worldly frivolity. She no longer sought to embellish her own personality in romances, in order to be the more beloved; henceforth she made a great effort to transmit to her books the best of her soul, in order to be more helpful to humanity. Her inspiration no longer proceeds solely from enthusiasm, she becomes generous and magnanimous. In thus rising above the selfish interests of life, the parties and intrigues of the world, Madame de Staël begins to work for posterity.

This epoch is marked by the production of the book on "Germany." Madame de Staël's new feelings stand out in the last chapters on "The Religion of Enthusiasm." This gives the moral dignity and the elevated tone to the work. Madame de Staël not merely proposes to accomplish the plan laid out in the book on "Literature," namely, to open to France new sources of poetry, — this she does in the first part of the work, — but she looks still higher; she endeavors to apply to a great nation the doctrine of progress, of which she is a stanch defender. She wishes to establish for others the justice and reason of those *rights of man* which the pure reason of the French proclaims as universal, but which the Emperor's statecraft would swallow up, as the Empire in France had absorbed the Republic; she seeks to defend the nations, — their independence, their originality; to show the peace of the future as derived from reciprocal rights of peoples; to declare that nations are not the arbitrary work of men nor the fatal result of circumstances, that "the submission of one people to another is contrary to nature;" to develop these great principles in relation to Germany; to remind "this poor and noble Germany" of her intellectual wealth even amid the ravages of war; to prove that Eu-

rope cannot obtain repose except by the liberation of this land; she endeavors, finally, to awaken the Germans to a self-consciousness, by crying aloud to them, "You are a nation, and you weep!"

How could she have dreamed that a book written in this spirit could not only be printed in France, but reopen the gates of Paris to the author? How could she have believed that Napoleon would relax his severity on reading a work which was the condemnation of his reign, and the whole tenor of which aimed to instil a rebellious spirit in this Germany which had become the pivot of his machinery? There is but one explanation. Madame de Staël longed more ardently than ever to return to Paris; and as she had become a changed woman, she imagined that the universe also was going to change. She confessed this ingenuously: "Bonaparte needed at this epoch but one honest sentiment to be the greatest sovereign in the world."

She ventured again within the circle of forty leagues which had been drawn around Paris against her approach. She established herself at Chaumont, in March, 1810, and superintended the printing of her book. Her usual attendants followed her, and left nothing undone to add to her glory. She announced

her intention of going to America, and begged an audience of the Emperor. "Eight years of sorrow change all characters, and destiny teaches resignation to those who suffer." She allowed herself the only flattery which she could with dignity address to Napoleon: "Your Majesty's disfavor throws upon those who are its objects such disgrace throughout Europe, that I can no longer take a step without feeling its effects." She sent an advance copy of "L'Allemagne" with the letter. Napoleon would not believe in Madame de Staël's conversion. "She is perpetual motion," he said to Metternich, who presented the petition for her; "she stirs up the *salons;* it is only in France that such a woman is formidable, and I do not want her here." Meanwhile the censors examined the book. Their opinion was that the author showed a lack of patriotism in provoking the Germans to independence, and of good taste in so praising their literature. Their censure, for the rest, fell upon merely a few passages, of which they demanded the suppression; and with this reserve they authorized the publication. The Emperor prohibited it; the police destroyed the edition, broke the plates, and hunted the manuscript. Savary warned the author in a letter which shows that if Napoleon had put

Madame de Staël at the orders of the *gendarmerie* he directed the style of his *gendarmes* after the manner of his court. A letter dated October 4 advised Madame de Staël to return to Coppet and to stay there.

This time it was real and unmitigated exile. She could neither write anything nor receive anybody. She saw her editor ruined, and Coppet forbidden to him. She felt herself "plague-stricken," and entered upon a course of deception, heretofore unknown to her, — "disaffections disguised as chest affections." She then commenced secretly to collect her souvenirs, and wrote the first part of the book which was afterward entitled "Ten Years of Exile." She attempted a long poem, imitated after Byron, which should have Richard Cœur de Lion for hero, and the Orient for the scene of action. She sketched a treatise on "Suicide," which was a refutation of her book on "The Passions." "Human existence, well understood, is nothing but an abdication of the personality for the purpose of absorption in the universal order." She condemns the charlatanism of the double suicide of Kleist and his mistress, which was then making a great stir in Germany. She denounces, with too great severity for the poet's works, the posthumous vanity of an "author without genius, who

would produce by a real catastrophe effects which he could not attain in poetry."

Thus she calmed herself by retiring within herself, like the sea after a storm, when the waves, rolling more and more slowly, become quieter and recede toward the horizon, where amid their rise and fall the sun sinks to rest. She thought herself forsaken forever; she felt herself drawing near to that dread hour "when the twilight no longer suggests the dawn," and fades "pale and colorless as a livid spectre, the herald of the night." "The door of my heart is shut," she said. She was mistaken; and the happiness which had eluded her when she followed it in ardent pursuit surprised her at the moment when she least expected it.

In the last months of 1810 there returned to Geneva a young officer of about twenty-three years of age belonging to the native aristocracy, Albert de Rocca. He had seen service in Spain, and had received a wound which obliged him to return home. He was slender, graceful, elegant, of gentle and charming manners; frank, tender, ingenuous; of a passionate heart, and an emotional, even vehement nature; of an original turn of mind, prone to leap to conclusions. Intrepid in war, he was merciful to the vanquished. He has

related his campaigns soberly and without too much embellishment. One might think one were reading Stendhal humanized, or Merimée grown tender. He was a hero of a new race; something of which Madame de Staël had not dreamed, with a charm possessed by no politic Valmont, or worldly Werther, or diplomatic René whom she had ever met. She found that he was wounded. She felt what she had often imagined in her books: "Ah! how beautiful is a proud and manly glance, when it is at the same time modest and pure! . . . Pity seized me at the same time as love." Nevertheless she resisted her feelings; she was almost twice the age of Rocca; but Rocca had fallen under the spell, and the spell was contagious. "I will love her so dearly that she will end by marrying me," he said. Delphine and Corinne that day had their revenge. Here was the man who dared to brave prejudice, and here was the woman submissive to him. The temptation was too strong for Madame de Staël to resist; but the marriage, celebrated in the early part of 1811, was kept secret. Madame de Staël retained her name; for she dreaded the opinion of her friends. She feared ridicule, and in fact she knew that the world, after having ascribed so many weaknesses to her, would

find it much easier to pardon her an accredited young lover than a young husband.

Rocca brought back to her what she had thought forever lost, — youth's illusion; and she knew at last the happiness of being completely beloved. Coppet suddenly became alive for her. There was a whirl of "*fêtes* and amusements." She wrote gay comedies for her theatre in place of the former sanguinary tragedies. Two of these were entitled "Capitaine Kernadec" and "Le Mannequin." Her friends were confounded. "She bewilders me more every day," said Sismondi. She began to play a new part; she no longer yearned for Paris; she forgot her book, and took no thought for another; she lived in the present. Forget Paris! — these words are the measure of her revolution.

Benjamin reappeared now and then. Madame de Staël's vivacity revived his own, and they once more dazzled their friends by their well-matched conversation. One day, during an excursion into Savoy, they went to drive, accompanied by Madame de Boigne and Adrien de Montmorency, and their discourse fell upon the letters of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. Madame de Staël and Benjamin began to talk, and they talked so well that nobody noticed a dreadful storm which came

upon them, or roads flooded with water, or the long halt of the carriage under the *porte-cochère* of an inn. The storm passed over. Benjamin and Madame de Staël continued to talk, and were still talking when on their return home the excursionists learned from their attendants of the experience they had undergone. But Benjamin could not long be the dupe of this change in affairs at Coppet. He was seized with jealousy, and his old ardor revived. He found himself supplanted, and it was his turn to rage. He twice challenged Rocca. He finally resigned himself to a retreat, as much humiliated now at his departure as he had once been at having to remain.

Coppet would have been henceforth the promised land, if the police had not made their stay there unendurable and almost perilous. The Emperor understood how to make it a wilderness. Schlegel was expelled; Mathieu de Montmorency and Madame Récamier, who had persisted in going there, received letters of exile. Madame de Staël was in despair at the thought of seeing them no more, and especially of being the cause of their disgrace. Then she began to tremble for Rocca. He belonged to the army; a summons, at any hour, might tear him away from her. Lastly, she trembled for her children

and for herself. Elzéar de Sabran wrote to her: "If you remain, he will treat you like a Marie Stuart, — nineteen years of misery and a catastrophe at the end of them." Without being treated like a queen of the old *régime*, she might be treated, like the Pope after the *Concordat*, to honorable captivity. She was assailed by fears; she could no longer work. She could sleep only by the aid of opium. She constantly thought of death. She decided to take flight; but her condition detained her. She was secretly confined, left the babe to the devoted care of a friend in the Bernese Jura, and prepared her departure with the greatest mystery.

Her children had some interests and property in Sweden, and she would find there, now wearing the kingly title, one of her old friends of the Republican period. She had always had a liking for Bernadotte; she hoped she could count upon him and find a refuge at his court. She departed the 22d of May, 1812, with her children, followed later by Rocca, and went by way of Vienna toward St. Petersburg. She sought in Russia "the last refuge of the oppressed," drawn toward this country by the same illusion which at the same time led the Emperor on to follow the last obstacle to his domination of the whole

continent. She cast a sad backward glance upon Coppet, and at the moment of putting "the irreparable" between herself and the graves dear to her there, she cursed the Corsican who had banished her from her country.

"The air of this beautiful land is not natal air to him," she wrote; "can he understand the pain of my exile?" He was to know this pain only too well; and he bore it to the very death. But who would believe it, this spring of 1812, when Napoleon had drafted every nation into his service, subjugated all the princes of Europe, and seemed to control even destiny itself?

CHAPTER VI.

The Work on Exile. — The Flight through Europe. — Last Years.

1812–1817.

THE Emperor treated her as a pretender. Madame de Staël was allowed to exaggerate the character she played throughout Europe. She would not have been a woman if she had not found, even in her persecution, an indirect homage which flattered her pride. This feeling is betrayed by the grandiose and exalted air which, in her book on the "Years of Exile," she gives to the account of her quarrels with Napoleon. Suspense and heart-burning appear there also in features too sharp and cutting to make it necessary to warn the reader of it beforehand. It is not a historical writing; the author judges nothing. Neither is it a pamphlet; the author does not write for the sake of publishing her book and stirring up the public mind. It is the sad wailing and the bitter imprecation of a victim. No doubt there are in these memoirs too many epigrams of the *salon* along with too many diatribes of the tribune. These are the side issues of the nar-

rative; they have grown stale. The narrative remains. It is copious; and in that part of the work which directly concerns Madame de Staël, she appears more philosophical than in her reflections. In a word, the philippics are matters of circumstance; the narrative is historical. It is enamelled with phrases *à la* Tacitus, which were to Madame de Staël's mind the sublimity of style. She tries as it were to soar with her disgrace; she flies like a wounded and complaining bird on baffled wing; but when she throws herself forward and the wind buoys her up, she uses the full play of her wings and regains the power of flight.

She execrates Bonaparte; she defames his glory and debases his genius; she never attacks his person. One cannot find either feminine perfidies or venomous insinuations in her vehement recriminations. She proscribes the Corsican from French history as an intruder and a stranger: "The daughter of M. Necker was more French than he." She paints him as "inebriated by the bad wine of Machiavelism, and as resembling in many ways the Italian tyrants of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries;" but in this malformed figure she still makes him of gigantic proportions, formidable in tyranny, eclipsing the subtle Borgias by all the height that separates

a colossal statue of Charlemagne from a little carved Italian image.

In 1800 it had seemed to Madame de Staël that a hazard of war, a spent ball, a grain of battle-dust, might change the destiny of the world. She is still more passionately persuaded of it in 1812. The Empire is a horrible machine which is embroiling Europe: "Only stop the motor and all will fall into repose." She hopes from the coalition of the kings the re-establishment of "all the moral virtues" in Europe. These monarchical justices will "snatch from the grip of the one man" the treasure stolen from humanity. She sadly deceives herself as to the princes and their enterprise; she suspects neither their avidity, their injustice, nor their secret wish, their only real motive, — namely, to preserve, under cover of a feigned affranchisement of Europe, the spoils which they have shared with Napoleon. They very soon put this in action, and Madame de Staël will judge them for what they are, — men of "but one idea, might, . . . mediocre men, time-servers, who have not the will to think beyond the present facts." But at the time she crossed Europe as a fugitive she would see only the nations rousing for their great fight, their proper fight, for independence. The French armies, in her

eyes, are only conquering and pretorian, mercenary in fact. Recruited to a large extent of foreigners, they no longer interest "true Frenchmen" or their cause. One might consider their defeat even as a good fortune for France. Napoleon in banishing Madame de Staël converted her healthy and upright soul into the soul of the exile. She had need of the lessons of 1814 and 1815 before she could regain her strength and clear-sightedness.

At Vienna she cast a bird's-eye glance over the actual political state of Europe, as shown by the staffs of the commanders and the councillors' tables, and she found it quite different from her dream. She was confused by it. But she attributed all the ill to that "deplorable alliance" which had degraded the noble court of Austria. She saw the Austrians as they really were, and she imagined that she saw them perverted. She thought them mean in servitude and mawkish in tyranny. Metternich's satellites almost made her regret Savary's *gendarmes*. In Poland she learned to know the conquest of the ancient *régime* as practised by the pretended liberators whom she summons to the holy league of the people. It was conquest by the police and the tax-gatherer, the spoiler of property, the oppressor of men's souls. She was astonished but

lately to find in captive Germany men who flattered themselves that they had gained from their French captors a breath of civilization and liberty. The Poles see no such mirage. She cannot accuse the copartners in the alliance of having mystified Poland as she reproached Napoleon for mystifying Europe. These unfortunate Poles received her as a persecuted sister. They seemed born to comprehend her; they are filled with the same great dreams, agitated by the same contrary passions, incautious, over-bold, adoring a liberty which they can only conceive of as absolute, and impatient either of the excess or the privation of it.

(She arrived in Russia the 14th of July.) That date on that frontier seemed to her a presage of freedom, —

"Chimène qui l'eût dit?"

"One could believe oneself in a republic when one reaches a country where the tyranny of Napoleon cannot make itself felt." She had simply reached a country at war with France. In her character of the illustrious enemy of Napoleon she obtained the *ukase* of the Czar commanding all Russians to do her the honors of the Empire. The officials obeyed the order literally; the nobility, more enlightened, gladly paid court to her. The

love of liberty did not enter into their zeal more than it had entered into the attentions of the Prince of Orange to Madame de Longueville or those of Philip IV. to Madame de Chevreuse. But though "liberalism" was ordered from above, hospitality was sincere, and the most generous hospitality in the world. Madame de Staël, it must be allowed, was appreciative of this.

For days together she rolled along in her carriage viewing the country. The vast plains suited her entirely intellectual character better than the mountains. She felt the grandeur of them and divined their poetry. "I felt a sort of spell such as one sometimes feels at night when one seems to be always walking but never advancing. This land seemed to me the image of the infinite, and as though it would take one an eternity to cross it." She found Moscow in arms. At Petersburg, the sea, the open sea! The blockade was raised. "I saw floating over the Neva the English flag, symbol of liberty!" She met Baron Stein, — the greatest, certainly, of Napoleon's proscripts, — and she read to him the chapter on "Enthusiasm" from her book on "Germany." She met again Joseph de Maistre, always at the opposite extreme from herself even in hatred of the Empire.

At last she was admitted to an audience with Alexander, and immediately fell under his spell. One sentence tells the story: "The Emperor Alexander did me the honor to come and speak to me." He avowed to her the errors of his past; he disclosed to her his great designs for the future. He confessed that he had submitted to the seductions of Napoleon; but he reset the scene and turned it into a symbolic drama. He described being taken up into a high mountain; but the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them had dazzled him only for a moment; he has conjured artifice and unmasked "the charlatanry of vice." Napoleon has "encountered conscience," and his calculations are confounded. Erfurt was but a dream, the interviews were only visions, the treaties apocryphal, all calumnious inventions! Madame de Staël not only exonerates Alexander, but she glorifies him by anticipation. "There is genius in his virtue!" This autocrat, who combines the mystic duplicity of the German with the facile exaltation of the Slav, shows himself to be infinitely more Machiavelian than the Corsican. Oh, if Bonaparte had received her with this effusion of confidence, how great he would have become in her eyes, and how easily, for at least some months, she, too, would have found her road to Tilsit!

She had some intercourse with Koutousof. That valiant and crafty soldier posed as the obedient and pious instrument of God's designs for his country. "He was an old man of gracious manners and vivacious physiognomy. I did not know whether I embraced a conqueror or a martyr, but I saw that he comprehended the grandeur of the cause with which he was intrusted." She thought less of the government than of the men; in the latter she saw the patriotism and national spirit which actually animated them; she made every effort to discern in the institutions of the country a spirit of liberty which was nowhere to be found. From this fantastic point of view she even placed Peter the Great far above Richelieu, "who did nothing but govern tyrannically within the empire and astutely without."

But she laid a wonderful hold on the characters around her: "They are all Russians at heart, and this gives them their force and originality." These Russians turn all their tastes to "luxury, power, and courage." Their genius is strange to her: one feels as though one stood at "the gateway of another land, near to the Orient, whence so many religious faiths have set out, and which still holds within its embrace inconceivable treasures of industry and reflection." They seem to bivouac even

in their palaces; they spend their lives as though on a race-course, in the sleigh, or the carriage, always at a gallop behind their horses, over an everlasting plain. Few ideas; only facts interest them. The police teach them silence. Society is only a march; a going and coming, with never any conversing. "In the midst of all this noise is there love?" the Italians would have asked. Corinne judges that there is more of domestic virtue and less of sentimental love than foreigners have represented. "In these fanciful and vehement natures love is rather a feast or a delirium than a profound and thoughtful affection." Their passions are simple and sudden; they go directly to the point, without taking account of difficulties, less still of means: "A Russian desire," said a clever man, "would blow up a city." The peasants have an air of "elegance and gentleness." She finds the nation full of mystery, and this mystery of the nation big with future events. The Russian people possess reserves of national virtue "enough to astonish the world." "What characterizes this people is a gigantic proportion in every direction. . . . Everything with them is colossal rather than well proportioned, audacious rather than well planned; and if the end is not attained it is because they overshoot it." These minds which

combine the wealth of the Orient with the visions of the North must certainly bring forth poets and artists; but Russian literature must be freed from the cold imitation under which it languishes, and Russians must seek their inspirations "in what is most intimate and real to their own souls." They will have a genius of their own "when they have found the means to express their own nature in language. . . . It is always among the people that one must seek the sap of the national genius."

Nowhere has Madame de Staël shown more perspicacity than in these pages. It is but a sketch; but all the essential features are there, and this outline of Russia deserves to be placed beside her great picture of Germany. She left Petersburg in September, and made her way to Finland. She was much struck by the great forests and scattered rocks; "but there is little life about these great ossifications of the earth." She sailed from Riga. The voyage depressed her. "I looked upon the land at the horizon as long as I could perceive it; the infinite strikes our view with as much fear as it strikes our souls with pleasure."

The court and society at Stockholm gave her a great reception. She allowed herself during her stay here the repose of which she was so much in need. Rocca — "Monsieur

l'Amant," as Byron afterward called him — had followed her, not without hindrance. His *rôle* was embarrassing, but he sustained it gallantly and with grace and dignity. Madame de Staël could not bring herself to publish their marriage, and yet she had it repeated or confirmed in Sweden. "She was always afraid of not being sufficiently married," says Rocca. It was in Stockholm that she wrote the second part of her "Ten Years of Exile," — the exodus of 1812. She began there also the great Apology of Necker, so long projected.

Bernadotte appeared to her grown larger, but not changed. This majestic Gascon, heroic and crafty, impressed her without stunning her; he was only a *parvenu*. She had thought of him for a high place in the Republic before the advent of Bonaparte; she placed him now on the throne of France to succeed Napoleon. Her good wishes had followed him in the wars in which he engaged, in his management of the alliance of the kings, of the opinion of the French, and especially of his army, which constituted all his prestige and the entire guaranty of his present elevation. Madame de Staël was not more amazed to behold him among the co-allies than to see another of her old friends, Moreau. She considered this contest of peoples merely as a

grand return of things, the national revolution reacting against France. "Enthusiasm had crossed over from the left bank of the Rhine to the right." This state of mind she carried with her to England when she went there in June, 1813.

There she printed and published in October the book on "Germany." The homage of the upper classes, the interest, the admiration, the sympathy of which she was the object, flattered her inexpressibly. If Germany was to her the land of enthusiasm, England was still the promised land of liberty. In this perspective she once more considered matters and men in England. Everything was there ennobled in her eyes, as everything in France was degraded under the lurid light of Napoleon. She deepened her knowledge of the institutions; she extended her study of the English political customs, and collected material from which she afterward drew the best portraits contained in the sixth part of the "Considerations," — Lord Grey, Lord Lansdowne, Sir James Mackintosh, Lord Harrowby, — "the best circle of clever men that England, and consequently the world, can offer." She knew Lords Erskine, Holland, Canning, and Byron; the latter did not cease to harp upon her weaknesses. Walter Scott was preparing "Waverley;" she affected him

with the same horror as she had Schiller, and he avoided falling into her way.

Always more expansive than inquiring, she harangued the English upon their own affairs, and confounded them by her flow of advice. They received her advice with as much indifference as politeness. She was not deceived by this phlegm, but the lesson she took led her to unexpected conclusions. "What ascendancy could a woman have, amiable as she might be, amid popular elections, parliamentary eloquence, and the inflexibility of the law?" This was to avow that neither in the monarchy of 1791, nor in the republic of the year III, nor in any other representative government, — that is to say, in any of her chosen forms of government, — was there any more place for her *salon*, her influence, or indeed for her political ideal. She was about to make proof of this, even in France.

Once more she thought of Bernadotte; then, as she familiarized herself more with European politics, she returned to the Bourbons. The force of circumstances brought her to this; she resigned herself, but was not converted. Her hopes of the coalition fell with each victory of the allies. When she saw strangers overleap that "solemn" barrier of the Rhine which she had thought placed there by Nature

against all Europe, and which she gratuitously believed consecrated by unanimous consent of the monarchies, she shook from head to foot, as though the ground over which she walked swayed beneath her. The veil was parted. She now knew that there was no *real France* save where the French flag waved. She turned upon Bonaparte again in her rage. She hurled against him the famous apostrophe uttered in the year VIII, — "What have they done with that land of France which I left to them so glorious?" unaware that at that very hour Napoleon was justifying by the same argument his lasting refusal to the everlasting equivocation offered by the fallacious peace of the allies, — "What! would you have me leave France smaller than I received it?" This was not the only encounter between herself and her tyrant to which the country's disaster unwittingly led. "Is it the time to speak of abuses when two hundred thousand Cossacks assail our frontiers?" said Napoleon to the Corps Législatif. Benjamin — always in quest of fortune and power, but gliding over realities — was working for Bernadotte. He had written a panegyric on the coalition: "On the Spirit of Conquest and of Usurpation." He sent it to Madame de Staël with a passionate letter. She replied to the letter: "You have con-

sumed my life. For ten years there has not been a day that I have not suffered on your account. How I have loved you!" — which was to say that she loved him no more. She replied to the pamphlet: "It is not the time to calumniate France when the Russians are at Langres. May God exile me from France forever rather than let me owe my return to strangers."

But she found them installed in France when she returned there in May. "Germans, Russians, Cossacks, Baskirs," — she found them conquerors, rapacious, brutal, spoilers, arrogant, and vindictive. She could not help admiring Wellington, but Alexander had descended from his pedestal and laid aside his Petersburg aureole. He reigned at Paris as a conqueror, and he exercised there with much pomp a very diplomatic clemency over France lying at his feet. Everything about this so much longed for revolution astonished and upset Madame de Staël. She did not recognize Europe, nor did she recognize herself any more. The spirit of '89 always glowing within her; her hatred of Napoleon satisfied even to satiety; her illusions dashed by the crusade of the allies; her hopes of the liberty of the people deceived: "All was confusion within me . . . I thought that the foreigners had shaken off the

yoke. I admired them without reserve at that epoch; but to see Paris occupied by them, the Tuileries, the Louvre, guarded by troops from the far confines of Asia, to whom our language, our history, our great men, were all less familiar than the last Khan of Tartary, was an intolerable grief to me." She felt shattered, stunned by the wear of agitations, the shocks of tribulation, and the burdens of life. Her friends found her "pale and thin, . . . completely changed."

She spent the summer of 1814 at Coppet, and returned to Paris in the autumn. She was much sought after; her *salon* was filled with friends; but her very success gave rise to new troubles. In the society of the Restoration she was confronted with the same difficulties as in the Republican society of the year III. The reaction made her indignant and rebellious, and she did not seek to hide her feelings. The members of the exile party manifested the same spectacle of intolerance as had formerly the regicidal aristocracy. The royalists who had supported Bonaparte now atoned for their idolatrous servility of yesterday by a furious zeal of orthodoxy. Bonaparte had slept in the bed of Louis XIV.; Louis XVIII. sleeps in the bed of Bonaparte. The ministers of the king oppose to liberty, which has but an in-

secure footing in the laws, all the artifices of imperial despotism. They lead on the submissive revolutionaries and retain them in their functions, but to the end that they may the more surely annul the laws of the Revolution. The charter is but an Edict of Nantes, the abrogation of which the ultra-royalists perfidiously urge. The Church reclaims the monopoly of the education of the people, and endeavors to recover all her prerogatives in the domain of thought. The army is filled with intruders, officers by favoritism, who, if they have seen service, have seen it only against the French. At this spectacle the patriot again awakes in Madame de Staël, and in the name of that glory which yesterday she condemned, she cried: "Is it thus that they should treat twenty-five millions of Frenchmen who lately conquered all Europe?" At last the *salon* becomes for sheer bitterness only a mob whose murmur has no echo: "The courtiers were of opinion that good taste forbade mention of politics or any other serious subject."

The return from Elba did not surprise her. At first glance she felt this event disastrous: "Liberty is done with if Bonaparte triumphs, and national independence is over if he is defeated." In haste she quitted Paris, where Benjamin with his sceptical near-sightedness, never

seeing the value of crises, was the dupe of what she calls "the idiocy" of *l'acte additionnel.* She rudely opened his eyes. But at the same time she preached peace to the foreigners. She addressed to an English friend a letter which is a second edition, revised and made appropriate to the circumstances, of her "Reflections" addressed to Pitt in 1795. After Waterloo, she wrote to the Duc de Richelieu: "The problem consists in the integrity of France, the departure of the foreigners, and the English Constitution openly and sincerely established." Hereafter this is what she waits for, and she is compelled to wait long indeed.

Rocca's health, which was much impaired, obliged them to spend the winter in Italy. She found there the caricature of Machiavelism, the artful and cowardly tyranny of bigoted monarchs. She saw the people doomed by these feeble despots to degradation and the dungeon. She is indignant to hear Napoleon and the French vilified by the best society around her: "It is rating France and Europe too low to declare that for fifteen years they have obeyed a poltroon." She took the part of the Italian nation against the Holy Alliance, as she had taken the part of the German nation against the Napoleonic conquest. All that was resurrected from the ruins of the old

régime galls her in Italy as in France. But she is able to turn away her eyes from it; she has her own happiness at her side.

"If I have a daughter," she said in "Delphine," "ah! how I will watch over her choice! how I will repeat to her again and again that for a woman all the years of life depend upon one day!" Her daughter was all that could be desired. She chose for her a husband of the *élite*, a grand seigneur and a great citizen, nobler still in heart than in birth. The marriage of Mademoiselle de Staël with the Duc Victor de Broglie was celebrated at Pisa in the month of February, 1816. In this quest of happiness which was her destiny, Madame de Staël had accomplished her masterpiece, and had realized for the one dearest to her in all the world the dream of her life.

At Coppet, to which she returned in June, she received Stein, a wanderer and imbittered like herself, having lost confidence in kings who were traitors to their word, ungrateful to their servants, spoilers of their people, eager to enjoy in selfishness the fruits of a struggle "which they had neither begun nor aided." How far it was from the book on "Germany," from the treatise on "Enthusiasm," from the Petersburg *soirées*, and the aurora borealis of 1812! In the autumn Madame de Staël again

established herself in Paris, in the rue Royal. In spite of political disturbances, there followed some brilliant months. But she felt her life ebbing from her, and the world she had known and loved was fading away. A new generation was rising around her, — the generation whose history Balzac has written, and which she saw, with horror, invading society. "They are intelligent, bold, determined, clever hunting-dogs, eager birds of prey; but that inner conscience which makes one incapable of deception, ingratitude, servility to power, and indifference to misfortune, — all those virtues which are of blood as well as of will and reason, were treated as chimeras or as romantic fancies by the young people of this school." These gilded dandies of the race of speculators are the direct descendants of the *roués* of the old *régime* trained in the service of Bonaparte; they are the rivals of Talleyrand, brought up to politics by Fouché. In her youth, Madame de Staël had measured the ravages caused by libertinage of the heart. She lived long enough to foresee the disorders that may be brought about by libertinage of statecraft.

It was in this state of mind that she wrote, with inspired pen and with an oftentimes bitter inspiration, the last chapters of her "Considerations." She employed the whole winter in

revising the first two parts of this work previously composed. The labor was beyond her strength. She became very feeble. Worn out by insomnia, enervated by the use of opium, terrified by the thought of death, she fled from that death, as it were "fighting against the invading ills with an heroic impetuosity; invited everywhere, going everywhere, keeping open house, receiving in the morning, at dinner, and in the evening." She was diverted then by conversation, but at night her restlessness would not let her keep her bed, and she walked to and fro for hours together trying to conquer her mind by fatigue, to benumb it, to soothe it. In the month of February, 1817, the malady so much dreaded seized upon her while at a ball at the house of the Duc Decazes. She fell paralyzed and could not rise again. This was, for her ardent nature and her fanciful imagination, the most horrible of afflictions. She had often pictured to herself its tortures: "A soul still alive united to a ruined body, inseparable enemies."

She bore her trial with resignation in her inmost soul, and before her friends with a sort of melancholy gayety. She made the most, in view of her death, of all that remained of her life and the last flower of her illusions. She had been removed to a house in the rue des

Mathurins, where there was a garden. Her friends must go to dine with her there, as though she were still doing the honors of her own house. "She was no longer in the drawing-room," says Chateaubriand, who finally did her some justice and ended by going over to her side. "On entering her room I approached the bed. The invalid, half sitting up, was supported by pillows, her cheeks burning with fever; her fine glance was fixed upon me, and she said, 'Bon jour, *my dear Francis*' (in English). 'I am suffering, but that does not prevent my loving you.'"

Rocca, very ill himself, surrounded her with tenderness. He was ever the constant object of her solicitude. She was afraid of dying without having time to bid him farewell. She begged to be awakened when the opium made her sleep, lest death should surprise her in the midst of it. And yet she watched with terror the signs of the end, "surpassing in horror even death itself." "Would it not be better," she said, "to let man's end come like the end of the day, and as much as possible make the sleep of death seem like the sleep of life?" This wish was fulfilled. She fell asleep in the evening of the 13th of July and never woke again.

She was interred at Coppet. "The proces-

sion," says Bonstetten, "passed between two rows of children and old people, — all the men were then engaged in harvesting, — until within the walls of the cemetery, near to the grove of beeches and poplars where stands the tomb in which her father and mother rest side by side. The day was magnificent, and the joyous song of the birds contrasted with the solemnity of the company assembled; the black-clad men seemed shadows come from another world beyond the thick woods. The grave lay under the shadow of the trees."

Her children paid her a last homage by publishing her marriage with Rocca, and receiving as a brother the child born of it. This act of filial piety supplied the society chronicles with matter for several days, and reawoke the attention of the public. Madame de Staël had wearied the *salons* with her genius, her eloquence, and the noise of her misfortunes. They were in haste to shake off her unwelcome *prestige* and to forget her. But this very forgetfulness of a world which had been the object of her idolatry, furnished to her posthumous mockers an opportunity for a last thrust. "The day of her praises is past; she received them in her lifetime, there is no more to be said," wrote Joubert. "Except for the newspapers, the end of a life which has

been so tumultuous would not have made the least stir." "She inspired in me," wrote a woman who in politics had followed quite an opposite course, "that sort of pity which I feel when I hear an account of the fervors of the ancient prophetesses, or of our own *convulsionnaires*. . . . She gave me the idea of a moral hermaphroditism."

The disappearance of the earthly form of Madame de Staël was not regretted by her children. They would gladly have drawn a veil over it, because there was not a single opinion passed by the world which did not clash with their own worship of her. Their mother, they thought, no longer belonged to them. The world had during her life only too truly stolen from them her person and her heart. But in bringing her back to the domestic temple, they desired to raise an enduring monument over her tomb. Therefore they published in 1818 and 1821 the manuscripts she had left to them; namely, "Considerations upon the French Revolution" and "Ten Years of Exile." (The "Considerations" is, together with the book on "Germany," the most important of Madame de Staël's works.) In publishing these manuscripts her children not only offered her, in the words of a contemporary, "brilliant and public obse-

quies," but they consecrated her to posterity. The Duchesse de Broglie once asked Sainte-Beuve, "Why do you occupy yourself with my mother? Does not what has already been written about her seem to you sufficient?" Why? Because she is the author of these two books; because she has opened, on the greatest affairs of the age, views which looked far into the age, and because she has entered once and for all into the patrimony of the glories of France.

CHAPTER VII.

The Book on Germany.

THIS book is the most finished of all Madame de Staël's writings; the composition is broad, the thought is just, the style well sustained. The whole work is governed by a plan, which is to make Germany known to the French; to explain it to them, and, by contrast, to explain France to the Germans and make them admire her more; to reinvigorate French literature; to enlarge the horizon, and to open to poetry new avenues to new sources. Madame de Staël brings to this work an intellect of extraordinary comprehension, a human sympathy, a love of truth, an enthusiasm for the beautiful which no one has ever excelled.

The work is divided into four parts: I. Germany and the Customs of the Germans. II. The Literature and Arts. III. The Philosophy and Ethics. IV. Religion and Enthusiasm.

Only the first two parts are a direct study of Germany; the third is a series of dissertations on questions dear to the author; the

last, a digression upon her favorite theme. The proportions of the book are therefore those of Madame de Staël's own mind. The tone is that of the time in which she lived. But in this sense the last two parts are valuable as testimony. The first two have lost nothing of their value. We now do differently, know more; but we comprehend no better, we feel no more keenly. The basis of the book still holds; and several chapters which made their epoch remain decisive.

The author is from the start impressed by contrasts. There is no classical prose in Germany; less importance is attributed to style there than in France; each one creates his own language. The poetry has more character than the prose, and it is at the same time easier to understand; probably because rhythm and measure regulate the thought and oblige it to be precise. Poetry in France is all spirit, eloquence, reason, or jest; poetry in Germany is all sentiment, — it is "the poetry of the soul." It touches and penetrates; it makes one see, and it makes one dream.

Madame de Staël belonged too much to the eighteenth century to appreciate the revolution which Chateaubriand had accomplished in French literature. But when she arrived in Germany, where she learned the language and

the literature at the same time, she felt spontaneously what had as yet escaped her notice in France, — the lively charm, the harmonious force, the mysterious suggestiveness of the words: "One does not say in French what one wishes to say, and one never sees floating about one's words those clouds of a thousand shapes which envelop the poetry of the Northern languages and awaken a host of recollections." She began to understand in Germany the essence of popular poetry. Herder was the herald of this poetry; Goethe opened the way to it. Comparing this with the gilt and tinsel Germany heretofore set forth in the odes, and the operatic Hermanns, pompous and ridiculous as the troubadours of the style of the Empire, Madame de Staël writes: "The simplest national song of a free people causes a more real emotion. It is only in their hearts that the Germans can find the source of truly patriotic songs." She wrote these lines in 1809. Uhland and Koerner were about to answer the call.

She admires Klopstock beyond measure; but Klopstock's is the "poetry of the saints," — virtue in verse, Necker turned poet; her admiration is of the nature of piety. She judges Wieland at a distance and justly, — "a German poet and a French philosopher who

alternately provoke each other; . . . national originality were far better." She finds this originality in Bürger, the poet of popular superstitions and reviver of legends. Schiller represents that "soul poetry" which is the special province of the poetry of Germany. Goethe dominates German literature and all contemporary literatures; with his nature, spirit, serenity, reason, and breadth of thought, he has all the great qualities and possesses the secret of eternal forms. "His imagination is struck by outward objects, as were those of the artists among the ancients; yet his reason has indeed attained the full maturity of our own times. Nothing shakes his strength of mind; and the very drawbacks in his character — his moodiness, embarrassment, constraint — pass as clouds around the base of the mountain whose summit is crowned by his genius." Like the ancients whom his powerful originality brings back to life, he retains all the simplicity and "artlessness of power." He is directly in touch with humanity and Nature. We find in him "those [primitive] miracles of sympathy between man and the elements." He "understands Nature, not only as a poet, but as a brother; and one might say that familiar voices spoke to him in air, water, flowers, trees, and indeed in all the primitive beauties of creation. It is this in-

timate alliance of our being with the marvels of the universe which gives to poetry its true greatness." Add this poetry of Nature to the poetry of the soul, remember that Madame de Staël knew nothing of André Chénier, and that she stopped short at Parny and Lebrun-Pindare, and you will see that her discoveries went deep, and there is no exaggeration in allowing the breath of genius in her revelations.

There are limitations, however. She can understand everything that can be explained in the conversation of the *salon;* she sees all that can be seen in passing in her carriage, — where again she talks more than she observes; she divines the national sentiment; she foresees the poetry that shall be derived from it, because her imagination is sympathetic, generous, and free. But she is not of this people, she does not descend to the lowly of heart. She has neither the taste nor the time for that. She has no conception of the poetry of elementary passions which she has not herself experienced. The idiomatic metaphors of the language do not call up to her imagination objects which have never been of interest to her. For this reason Vos's "Louise" seems to her vulgar and foolish. I doubt whether, had she read "Truth and Poetry," she would have experienced any pleasure in Sesenheim's incom-

parable idyl. The masterpiece of Goethe and of German literature, one of the masterpieces of modern art, "Hermann and Dorothea," not only makes no distinct place for itself in her view, amid contemporary works, but it does not impress her at all. She has hard work to bring herself — on the faith of Humboldt, "one of the most cultured men of the whole country" — to admire the "natural dignity" of the hero and heroine of this rustic poem, the incidents and personages of which seem to her of too little importance. "It lacks," she adds, "a certain literary aristocracy of tone," without which there can be no great masterpieces.

On the other hand, she enters the domain of the theatre with a bold step. All phases of this seem to have been made accessible and familiar to her. It is to the theatre particularly that her famous definition of "romanticism" is applicable. If she did not actually invent that word, she certainly popularized it. The word "romantic" was used of characters and landscapes which recalled the Romans, and was employed as a synonym of "Roman." Wieland, by analogy, used it in German to indicate the country in which the ancient Roman literature still flourished. The first French translator who came across the word in this acceptation of it commented upon it as having the

meaning of "the land of the fairies;" another translated it, "the country of the Romans;" a third puts simply "the romantic regions;" and the word, which was at first convenient because indeterminate, entered into common literary usage through a misconception. Madame de Staël defines it thus: "We take the word 'classic' sometimes as a synonym for perfection. I use it here in another sense in considering classic poetry as being like that of the ancients, and romantic poetry like that which holds in some manner to chivalric traditions. This division relates equally to two eras of the world, — that which preceded and that which followed the establishment of Christianity."

One cannot better defend the classic French theatre, particularly Racine, against German prejudices than she does; one could not show better reasons than those she gives, why this theatre, the most unique in the world in abstract theories, the most exclusively French, and French in a society at once very close and refined, should remain forever impenetrable to foreigners. She is not less apt in bringing out German dramas, and translating them for the use of the French public. Her judgment of Lessing is sound; she analyzes Schiller eloquently; she admires "Don Car-

los," and still more "Maria Stuart" and "Wallenstein." "Wilhelm Tell" pleases her less, for the same reason as "Hermann and Dorothea," in spite of her interest in the "respectable conjuration of Rütli." Elsewhere she pays homage to this high poetic conception which, as in "Athalie," makes the nation figure as the hero of the drama. She shows that Goethe has no genius for the theatre. He puts admirable poems such as "Iphigenia," or great historic studies such as "Goetz" or "Egmont," into dialogues; he lavishes upon them "the brush-strokes of Michael Angelo:" but these are not dramas, and his works fall flat on the stage.

We must stop awhile over her study of "Faust." Benjamin Constant could understand nothing whatever of this masterpiece. He sees in it a "derision of the human species," an obscure and heavy counterpart of "Candide." Madame de Staël sees in it what Goethe put into it, and adds to it nothing of her own devices. Her interpretation proceeds fresh and real from her conversations with the poet. The trash of commentators has since disfigured and almost blurred the work. Every Frenchman who does not know German, who has not lived in Germany, and who would enjoy Faust, would do well, before reading a trans-

lation, to study Madame de Staël's analysis. Without it, if he is very patient and very subtle, he may perhaps imagine that he understands the explanations of scholars, but he certainly will not understand the poem. "Faust" is delineated in a few lines, and one can see very well why Benjamin found in it nothing to his taste: "Faust combines in his character all the weaknesses of humanity,— the desire to know and the fatigue of toil, the need of success and the satiety of pleasure. . . . He has more ambition than strength; and this inward craving makes him revolt against nature." He is the lasting type of those "candidates of vice who have a good will to do evil, but lack the talent to accomplish it." At this point he differs from Molière's terrible Juan. This Don Juan is carried off by the Devil, but he defies him and does not yield himself to him. Faust is devoted to sorcery and witchcraft; the Devil whom he evokes makes him afraid and mocks at him. Mephistopheles is marvellously well understood by Madame de Staël. It is because she does not seek to know him through the legend, of which he retains only the costume. She takes him in real life, out of which he comes, in the age of which he is the deformed child, impious and evil-doing, but of which he has the real spirit. It is a devil who is the con-

temporary of Frederick, of Voltaire and Laclos; licentious and ironical to the last degree; always "he who denies," who limits all things, lowers all things, analyzes all things, annihilates the soul, drives away the conscience, ruins the reason; a devil who has read Wolf, Pufendorf, Rousseau, Diderot, and Holbach, and kills each with the other; who vilifies humanity, drowns the vanity of man in human mire, jeers at corruption, and amuses himself with confounding the human mind even in the depths of scepticism, — for he is jocosely perverse, and a bantering Nihilist; he thinks that of all the follies in the world denial is that which furnishes the most laughter. There is nothing about him that one can lay hold on; he has no vulnerable spots, lame though he is, — lame as the vice he fans and as the justice he mocks at. If one listens to him one is lost; he takes hold of you through pride of life, and leads you to contempt of yourself. "It is the delirium of the mind and the satiety of reason, . . . together with poetry of bad principles, an intoxication of evil, an aberration of thought, which make one shudder, laugh, and weep all at once."

The part devoted to the novels is less original and not so well developed as that which treats of the theatre. Yet her life at Coppet

had fitted Madame de Staël to appreciate "Wilhelm Meister." This she found charming; she had lived like this book, and she found it living. She is enthusiastic for Jean Paul; she thinks she understands him, and compares him with Montaigne. The chapters devoted to criticism as employed by Lessing, Herder, and Schlegel, "the power of knowing and admiring," are to be counted as among the most fruitful in the book. I will delay but little over the philosophy. Madame de Staël speaks only from hearsay, and she imagines more than she analyzes. She finds in Kant only a reviver of the idea of duty: "He would re-establish primitive truths and spontaneous activity in the soul, conscience in morals, the ideal in the arts." The rest — that is to say, the *critique* of pure reason — escapes Madame de Staël in its direct object, and especially in its consequences. Her Kant, humanitarian, liberal, eclectic, and kindly, the disciple of the "Vicaire Savoyard" and who submitted his *critique* to Necker's censure, is a conventional Kant. For Madame de Staël's purposes, the ruling ethics of Germany must be sweet and "sensible;" and Madame de Staël puts it there by grace or by force. In this order of ideas, that which ought to have interested her most — namely, the influence of

Fichte on the national mind — never seems to have struck her. As to metaphysics itself, it is bottomless and she shuns it. Her natural good sense glides over the logomachy of the great abstracters of quintessences. She had not understood a bit of it, and she does not convey an idea of it. In the chapters on the religion of enthusiasm, Germany is but a chapter-head.

There now remain only the social customs and the governments. The impressions gathered by the author in the course of her travels are here summed up and reasoned out. They are almost always just. Madame de Staël remarks the difference between the north and the south of Germany. In the south, that "mild and peaceable monarchy," favorable to the development of an independent literature; the sort of liberty to write and think which existed in France under the old *régime* which tolerated all abuses in suppressing all natural rights. This liberty is better defined and exercised in Prussia. There all seems sterner and ruder. She appreciates Frederick in his work of government, and she analyzes this work well in reciting the causes of its decadence; but the elements of regeneration are apparent, and this is essential in this order of studies. There is never any lack of libellists

and diplomats who succumb to appearances and announce the corruption of the State. The thinker discerns the life that is latent, and the sap that will rise again. It takes genius to predict a resurrection. Madame de Staël foretold the resurrection of the State of Prussia. She hoped for that of the whole German nation, and marked out the conditions for it.

The principal obstacles arise out of certain characteristics: the Germans are too apt to confound "obstinacy with energy, rudeness with firmness." They have certain social virtues, but they are the virtues of weakness. They are, she says, visionary, good, faithful, loyal, sincere, full of kindness, little inclined to war, submissive to power even to a servile degree, slow even to inertia; they put poetry into everything, and all their poetry they put to music. Their character is "patchy," like their country. Only a national spirit, by providing a united nation for them, can develop in them the quality which they lack. This would make them revolt against the foreign arm which now holds them subject, and against the foreign influence which now warps the course of nature. They imitate too much, indeed, and too openly. They are too cosmopolitan; they are too eager to know and to understand all things, even at the risk of losing

themselves in this unlimited scrutiny of others: "He who does not take in the affairs of the universe has nothing to do there." They have not enough "national prejudices." "The patriotism of nations should be egotistical." The Germans have too much knowledge and too little experience; they are not realistic enough in their affairs. Energy does not show itself except in free countries and powerful States. In this respect the Germans have everything to learn from England concerning public liberty, and from France everything concerning national and state activities. They will never learn these by themselves. They will ripen for national independence, but they are still too immature for political liberty. They need a master to arouse the nation, and this master must be a German prince.

The author, following her natural sympathies rather than her experience of history, takes no notice of the contradiction which at this point undermines her structure. The Germany which she idealizes in 1810 corresponds, in her fancy, to France in 1789. In Germany she sees a nation to be resuscitated; in France she had seen liberties to be re-established. In France the revolution, social and civil, was realized under the consulate, but degenerated under Bonaparte's empire and dethroned the

France of 1789. The national revolution can only be realized in Germany by the "Prussian Spur," and it will in turn uncrown the Germany of 1810. The charm of that Germany is her very misfortune and oppression. The ideal is the consolation of the afflicted whose kingdom is not of this world. In becoming national, united, strong, in being inspired by "egotistic patriotism" and "national prejudices" which Madame de Staël desires for them because these fall under the conditions necessary to the independence and power of great peoples, the Germans will lose their apparent simplicity and all the poetical attributes of weakness. Madame de Staël never perceived this, for it would have been necessary for her to glance ahead through half a century and take in the significance of three revolutions. But amid the fright and bewilderment of the Napoleonic conquests she discerned the steady and firm advance of national ideas in Germany, and that was much indeed.

Nobody has disputed her, but many have blamed her. Recent criticism has shown more severity and injustice on this point than even the Napoleonic censure. Madame de Staël's hope was rash, they say; patriotism should have forbidden her to harbor such a hope; to publish it was almost equivalent to treason.

Let us understand her; this hope was the very hope of the French Revolution. Madame de Staël simply remained faithful to it; and it is not her fault at all that by a deplorable reverse in our history, the national breath of the Revolution turned about then and has since turned against France. There was then, and there has always been, but one means of avoiding this reverse; and that is to judge as Madame de Staël did, and to take the significance of events as the fundamental counsel of politics. The year 1870 reversed the proportions of the book on "Germany," and altered what were Madame de Staël's points of view. Criticism has overlooked this optical change, and has taken no account of it at all. "This whole country resembles the dwelling-place of a people long absent from it." Such was the Germany Madame de Staël knew and described. In contrast to this Germany, filled with political distress and moral greatnesses, she holds up as a lesson to Germans forgetful of their dignity and as a warning to Frenchmen forgetful of their ideal and their liberties, a France which in the picture she draws of it strongly resembles the Germany which appeared to us after 1870, — a France which has abjured the great dreams of humanity, — a France all armed, all avaricious, and all conquering, knowing no

right but that of the strongest, no justice but that of success, no law but that of numbers. "The French are only powerful in the mass, and even their men of genius take their guidance from accepted opinions when they wish to make a plunge beyond." France of steel, compact, homogeneous, obedient, disciplined, a formidable machine of State, — "The present and the real belong to her." It is to the French enlisted by Napoleon that Madame de Staël addresses the apostrophe which forms the conclusion of her book, and which by a strange turn of fortunes applies now to the Germany of Bismarck, the Germany of iron and of fire: "If enthusiasm were quenched on your soil, . . . an active intelligence, a sapient impetuosity, would still make you masters of the world; but you would leave there only traces of torrents of sand, terrible as floods, arid as the desert."

It may be said with truth that the book on "Germany" was not the work of a politic woman. The Princess des Ursins would never have conceived the idea, in her disgrace, of composing such a book on the Spaniards. If a lady of the Court of Russia had written on Poland in this style, the great Catherine would have at once ordered her to be transported to Siberia; but when this book is qualified as anti-

French, it is a sin against conscience. To choose the hour of the deepest abasement of a people crushed by conquest, — the hour when her princes begged for her body at the feet of the conqueror, when her great men celebrated the genius of the victor, and demonstrated the historical necessity for his victory, — to choose this hour to recall this people to its rights and titles of humanity; to animate it to independence, to warn it that it must owe to a revolt of its own conscience its regeneration and health; to warn the victor that he was going too far, that he was in the wrong, that the wind that blew him forward would one day turn against him, that the current would change, and that if he did not retrace his steps the reaction of his own victory would carry him backward: to conceive these ideas, and, for the sake of disseminating them, to wander as an exile over all the high-roads of Europe, — this is the deed of a generous soul, and by its very imprudence one of the most entirely French in its nature ever performed by any French writer.

CHAPTER VIII.

"CONSIDERATIONS UPON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION."

ALTHOUGH "L'Allemagne" is the most perfect of Madame de Staël's works, the "Considerations" is the most profound and virile. It is unfinished. I doubt if the author could have ever corrected its faults of composition. This book transformed itself under her pen. To give it unity, the first and last parts — the parts dearest to Madame de Staël's heart — would have to be sacrificed. Her first intention was to write an apology for Necker. She wished to put the portrait of her father in the foreground of a sort of gallery of France during the Revolution. The Revolution little by little invaded the gallery, and pushed the portrait into a corner. With the Restoration in 1814 and 1815, Madame de Staël believed that the cycle which she proposed to portray had come to an end. Then she saw the French Revolution contested in its principles, its legitimacy, and its essential results. Events led her to defend this revolution, and to bring up

the great recollections of it which she had preserved. The second idea submerged the first. For the justification of her own and Necker's ideas, she added to her studies of France "a picture of England." This picture she enlarged, and it became the sixth part of the work. Finally, all her convictions having been dashed in 1816, she again went into battle, and set forth her views on the government of the restored monarchy. This part, made up of discussion solely, forms the fifth part of the book. The "Considerations" is therefore composed of several works, one upon another, — a filial apology, a defence of the Revolution, a medley of personal souvenirs, a political study of the English Constitution and society, and fragments of articles and discourses on the affairs of France during the year 1816.

The Revolution is the common ground of these studies; it sustains and throws all the parts into relief. The writer presents its development, as she conceived and observed it, from its point of departure, in the Constituent Assembly of 1789, to its conclusion in the Constitutional Charter of 1814. In this history of a quarter of a century she follows all the crises of liberty, and shows liberty to be the essential object and accomplishment of the

French Revolution. It is the history of the spirit of 1789; it is more than the history, it is the resurrection of that spirit. Even if the "Considerations" did not contain historical parts of the first importance, it would still be classed among the most precious documents. The Revolution is treated as a whole, and from the point of view most just for that epoch. It is not from the scaffold of Louis XVI. and from within the prisons that it ought to be considered, in order to understand the reasons for it, and to explain even its very excesses; it is from the throne of Louis XVIII. and from Paris the home of the returned exiles. Therein lies the originality of Madame de Staël's book; there lies its strength. The leading idea is contained in this fine maxim which the author applies to all the parts with a lofty impartiality: "All minorities invoke justice, and justice is liberty. One can only judge a party by the doctrine which it professes when it is strongest."

The Revolution, she says, not only made France free, but prosperous. It was no doubt sullied by crime; but there never was a time when it did not bring forth in the French the best virtues of humanity as well. The honor and strength of the Republicans lay in their love of country. The Vendéans "exhibited the

character that makes free men." Let no one therefore exaggerate the subject of cruelty and faction. In England during the Civil War, in France during the Religious Wars, the same fanaticism engendered the same crimes. There remained to the credit of the French Revolution the noble enthusiasm which it inspired, the great deeds and the great souls which it aroused, the principles which it laid before the future, and the liberty which it founded upon indestructible bases.

The solidity of these bases is derived from the fact that they are sunk almost indefinitely in the past of France. It is not depreciating the Revolution, but confirming it for posterity to fix it so in the history of France. Here is the place for the writer to give her views of history (Montesquieu is her teacher): History deduces the necessary relations resulting from the nature of things; it points out and explains the eternal conditions of progress for States and peoples. This is the ground of the method and the art of thinking in history. But the historian, if he would move men, should speak to their imagination. He must " penetrate the past, interrogate the human heart through all ages, seize upon a fact through a word, and upon the character and customs of a nation through a fact." Never-

theless, facts and words are but signs destined to represent the profound causes which produce them. These causes govern even the caprices of passion and the accidents of chance which the scepticism of Voltaire was pleased to declare the sole motives of humanity. Reduced to this, history would lose its meaning and moral; it would be no longer either a science or an instruction. The history of the Revolution, in particular, is sealed to any such frivolous interpretations. This great crisis is inexplicable by petty facts; the action of casual events and of individuals disappears from it, as though submerged in the flood. Secondary causes in it can only be explained by general ones. It is the one great aim, the national aim here, which supersedes all others and which alone explains everything else.

This conception of history is just. The application of it to the past of French history is defective. Madame de Staël lacks not facts, but a guide. Why did she not live until 1823? Guizot's Essays, which have illuminated all the avenues of French history, would have set her upon the right road, and she would not have been compelled to grope about in the dark.

She developed this fine proposition inspired by Montesquieu, and defined by herself during

the meditations of her tour in Russia: "It is important to repeat to every partisan of the rights which are rooted in the past, that it is liberty which is ancient, and it is despotism which is modern." Local and provincial liberties have formed the nation; royalty deformed it in taking selfish advantage of it; but it has not annihilated it indeed, and the nation found itself whole and entire when it shook off its bonds. "From the old age of Louis XIV. to the French Revolution, mind and might lay with individuals, and the government was in its decline." It had to be so, or the advent of those fiery, independent, and heroic souls, a whole generation of patriots and heroes, after three quarters of a century of State decadence, would have no explanation. In the heat of her liberal demands, Madame de Staël denies to Richelieu any great political conception whatever: he destroyed "the originality of the French character, its loyalty, its candor, its independence." She speaks of him as of Napoleon: "He was a foreigner in France." Bonaparte was a Corsican of Italian blood; Richelieu was a priest brought up in the Italian schools. She refuses any admiration for Louis XIV. up to the time of his misfortunes. She will see nothing great in his reign. She discerns, on the contrary, with

wonderful clearness all its excesses, and shows their consequences. She had no need for recourse to comparison (which is the whole philosophy of history) of the article on "Religionnaires" in the "Répertoire" of Guyot in 1785 with the article on "Emigration" in the "Répertoire" of Merlin in 1807, to discover in the edicts of Louis XIV. the spirit and the very letter of the laws of proscription of the Reign of Terror.

This retrospective course, wherein the writer meets with many a snag and drifts from the path many a time in the fog, nevertheless holds to the main course and pursues one constant aim. It leads Madame de Staël to her end, which is a large view of history: The great results of the Revolution were accomplished by means of what was purest and noblest in the French nation; the crimes were due to the eternal perversity of mankind. The government of the old *régime* did nothing to control this perversity in the French people; if some germs of it still remain in them, it is not in re-establishing the old *régime* that this corruption will be annihilated. The institutions of the old *régime* were what "formed the nation; and if it was in their nature to elevate but one class of men and to deprave the rest, assuredly they were worth nothing. . . .

Doubtless, in taking the curb off of the people, one puts them into a position to commit all sorts of crimes; but how comes it that this people is depraved enough for this? The government that we hear spoken of in terms of regret had time enough to form the nation which shows itself so culpable. The priests whose education, example, and riches, they say, are theirs to do good with, presided at the birth of the generation which is now let loose against them. . . . The fury of the revolt is in proportion to the vices of the institutions; and it is not to the government that one desires to have, but to the government that one has had for a long time, that one must look for the moral condition of a nation."

These are the best lines in the book. I will not enter into the detail of impressions, recollections, and opinions. I have merely tried to give the essential points in the preceding chapters. Everything personal in the " Considerations " was made mention of in the life of the author. I refer here only to the " Considerations " properly so called, — the synthetical reflections, formed at long range. I do not need to remark that the figure of Necker is disproportionate; yet it is somewhat edifying, like the Byzantine pictures, — flattened colossi of familiar saints. No one can

pass a better judgment upon the Constituent Assembly, "which united so many shining lights to so many dark errors, which accomplished a lasting good and at the same time a great and immediate evil," which laid down fecund and tutelary principles, set up useless and even harmful institutions, but which, nevertheless, gave to the national genius an impulse of which one could truly say in 1816: "If we are astonished to see that France has yet so many resources within herself in spite of her reverses, . . . it is to the decrees of the Constituent Assembly that we must attribute the fact."

The chapters on exile are full of historic sayings long since passed into aphorisms. The real sophistry of the Terrorists is thus unmasked: "It is just when the danger is passed that popular tyrannies are established." The honor of the country's benediction is rendered to whom it is due: "One more problem remains to be solved: it is how the government of 1793 and 1794 triumphed over so many enemies. . . . This prodigy can only be explained by the devotion of the nation to its own cause."

These views are far-reaching; I have before this shown their limitations. I will not return, therefore, to the subject of democracy, which

Madame de Staël dreaded and avoided; nor to military glory, which she underrates; nor to conquest, which she disapproves; nor to armed propaganda, which she condemns; nor lastly, to Bonaparte, whom she curses. She refuses to consider the origin, reason, and development of the events which seem to her deviations from the French Revolution as she understood it. The things that crushed her life and shattered her hopes seem also to her to have crushed and shattered the history of France. Bonaparte, according to her, had ruined and blasted the new France, as his predecessors, Richelieu and Louis XIV., withered the old. With equal severity she concludes, concerning his reign: "Of all the heritage of his terrible power, there remains to the human race only the knowledge of a few more secrets of the art of tyranny."

One side of France — the heroic, the State as a whole — entirely escapes the notice of the daughter of Necker. But her passionate periods are not altogether inspired by rancor. Madame de Staël is partial, but she is not blind. She denies what she refuses to see; but what she wishes to see, she sees clearly. The reverse side of the consular and imperial epoch, which is what she shows to posterity, is shown equitably. Bonaparte has fallen by

the time Madame de Staël writes. His legend will read contrary to Madame de Staël. The songs of Béranger, the odes of Victor Hugo, the history of Thiers will popularize and transfigure immeasurably the glorious image of the Emperor, the emancipator of peoples, the legislator of the French, the Charlemagne of the Revolution. But for the sake of justice, right, and common-sense there are some objections and some limitations to be put in the name of the liberty of the French, of the rights of humanity, and of the Revolution understood as a consecration of that liberty and those rights. By means of the vengeance and folly of the royalists, Madame de Staël in 1816 saw ideas and words falsified for the second time in men's minds, and the disastrous misunderstandings of the year VIII repeated. "God preserve us from that now and forever!" she cried, as she thought of a possible return of the Cæsar. "But we must be careful not to call Bonapartists those who sustain the principles of liberty in France!" This is the peril that she would avert. And this warning to the future corrects whatever is defective in these chapters to the mind of a party that is now of the past.

The chapters on the two Restorations are almost decisive. The historian is here present,

keen of sight and well under control in passing judgment on French affairs. The men of the times are well placed, and events are in their proper proportions. Both are traced to their sources, and begin over again, in a way. Madame de Staël did not discover the links that unite the victorious and Cæsarian Republic to the wholly liberal Revolution of 1789; but between this Revolution of 1789 and the Restoration of 1814 the links form themselves in her very hands. She revives again, in her denunciation of the pernicious and absurd designs of the ultras, the energy and eloquence of the times of the Constituent Assembly.

"Must we always govern in a style three hundred years behind the times, or will a new Joshua command the sun to stand still? . . . It would be curious to know to which generation of our forefathers infallibility has been ascribed. . . . They desire an absolute king, an exclusive religion and intolerant priests, a court nobility founded upon genealogy, a commons enfranchised from time to time by means of letters patent of nobility, a people ignorant and without rights, an army that shall be a mere machine, ministers without responsibility, a press without liberty, no juries, no civil liberty, but police-spies and

newspapers bribed to laud this work of darkness."

And what are the means by which history is so distorted? Courts of high commission, state-prisons, crooked elections, electoral colleges bought, Protestants and republicans delivered over to a frenzied and fanatical populace; and lastly, the intrusion of the clergy everywhere in the State, and religion everywhere the servant of politics. Madame de Staël has studied the writings of the new theologians; she has read the orders of the bishops, and cries out, "Will their senses take leave of them?" The Christian in her protests as vehemently as the citizen. Christianity, she says, is synonymous with justice and liberty; by what right shall these sentiments, the noblest on earth, be interdicted "an alliance with heaven"? One can measure the extent of her indignation against such doctrines, and the horror which such retrograde movements inspire in her, by the impetuosity of the feelings that carry her away. This woman, so aristocratic in tastes and mind, convinced moreover of the social necessity of religious beliefs, and a Christian in whatsoever concerns this necessity, declares without reserve that religion is exclusively an affair of the home. She had seen the clergy at work before 1789; they

were powerless. She considers them dangerous in 1816. "Public education is a duty of the government to the people, and one upon which it cannot first levy the tax of this or that religious opinion. . . . Who will teach religion and morals to the children, it has been asked, if there are no priests in the schools? . . . It has certainly never been the upper clergy who have fulfilled this duty; and as to the curates, they are more needed for ministrations to the sick and dying than for instruction, except as concerns the knowledge of religion. We must establish and increase the number of schools in which, as in England, poor children are taught to read, write, and reckon; we must have colleges for the teaching of ancient languages, and universities for carrying on still further the study of those beautiful languages and the study of the advanced sciences."

Nowhere better than in these chapters does one grasp the hindrances without number which stopped and finally overturned the work of the Restoration, paralyzed the good-will and the politics of Louis XVIII., wore out the great soul of Richelieu, ground down the noble genius of Serre, and ruined in advance the generous enterprise of Martignac. The presentiment of the inauspicious aberrations that menaced France and, above all, the fear of dis-

couragement into which new trials might throw the liberals, and which again drove Madame de Staël to England, — this is the key to the sixth part of the "Considerations."

Madame de Staël's "L'Allemagne" is often compared to the "Germany" of Tacitus. The comparison would be more just as regards the sixth part alone. It is England which is Madame de Staël's true Utopia. "Admirable monument of the moral grandeur of man! . . . No people in Europe can be put on a parallel with the English since 1688; there are one hundred and twenty years of social improvement between them and the continent." The author's incursions into the past of England present the same uncertainties as her incursions into the past of France. Her pictures and characters of contemporary England are much idealized. Corinne with all her visions, the always inconsolable betrothed of the illusory Nelvil, is the painter of them! But what sound thought when the author comes to earth again, and what admirable lessons of history, what noble teachings of political morals, in her address to the French people! Let them take courage, she says to them, for themselves and their revolution; let them, above all things, never declare themselves incapable of liberty. This was said to the English at a similar time,

when they were achieving their freedom. Consider the English of yesterday, and you will recognize the French of to-day. We must constantly bear in mind the fanaticism, the disorders, the atrocities of the revolutions in England. "They deposed, killed, overturned more kings, princes, and governments than all the rest of Europe together. . . . In the early history of this people there is more violence, more inequality, and in some respects more of a spirit of servility than among the French." And yet they reached the land of promise. "It is a beautiful sight, — this constitution, vacillating a little as it sets out from the port, like a vessel launched to sea, yet unfurling its sails and giving full play to everything great and generous in the human soul."

To this promised land all the peoples of the earth are called; and all, sooner or later, will reach it. The author invites them thither; and it is with a wish for the independence of all nations that this warm apology of free government concludes. There are some pages of great perspective in it, and these are the political testament of Madame de Staël. The future belongs to the nations, and the progress of civilization should sanction their independence. It is contrary to nature that one nation should be subject to another. The Revolution

throughout Europe will be accomplished by and for the nations. It will take a national form, and under this form it will prevail against all men. It is the imperative course of history. "Nothing durable can be accomplished except by the universal impulsion. . . . Anything is better than to lose the name of nation." Madame de Staël foresaw the national future of the Russians; she announced the supremacy of North America; she hoped for the Germans and the Italians the chance to constitute themselves into federations. She foresaw that between these nations, aroused and gathered together, there would necessarily be conflict; she apprehended even then the conflict between the "Germans and the Esclavons," as she calls the Slavs; but she relies upon this maxim inscribed in the book on "Germany," and which supplies the temperament necessary to every enterprise of national ambition contrary to the rights of nations: "When a nation admits within her borders as subjects strangers who are enemies, she does herself almost as much harm as when she receives them as masters; for then there is no longer in the body politic that unity which personifies the State and constitutes patriotism."

CHAPTER IX.

Her Influence. — Posterity in Politics, History, and Literature.

In her writings Madame de Staël was especially anxious to be a guide and leader. She succeeded. Few writers have exercised, in so many different directions, so lasting an influence. This influence has been more efficacious and more recognized since the death of Madame de Staël than during her lifetime. The reason is that the intrigues of her *salon* compromised the sincerity of her expressions, and the intemperance of her language thwarted the effect of her writings. One may say of her whole life and of the fate accorded to her works what Chateaubriand said of her early years, her years of trial and of passion: "According as her youth weighed less on her life, her thought emerged from its chrysalis and put on immortality."

She has had the rare privilege of a double posterity, if I may so express it, each equally glorious. She has founded a dynasty; and few houses, even among the most illustrious, offer

such a succession of original talents. But her descendants are not, properly speaking, her disciples; and if one would follow her direct inspiration, it is in another posterity, purely intellectual, that he must seek it. This inspiration appeared, clearly defined, in politics, history, and literature.

The Restoration opened the political world to Madame de Staël. Her friends form a group whose right rests upon Mathieu de Montmorency, the left upon Sismondi, and the centre on Camille Jordan. Benjamin hovers on the outskirts of the parties, hostile to all and impatient for a place where he would never be able to remain. To this group of friends must be added the men who received their impulse at a greater distance, who nevertheless feel it distinctly: the Duc Victor de Broglie, who will retain to the end, with all his firmness of character, the generous glow of heart; Serre, the man who never put the least soul into his politics, — his campaign of 1819, the heroic epoch for the Constitutional Monarchy, was animated entirely by the spirit of Madame de Staël; she seemed resuscitated for it. Then comes the liberal progeny of the Restoration, the followers of "La Doctrine" and the "Globe," — politicians, literary men, orators of the academy and the tribune, more

eloquent than active, and more excellent in opposition than they will be in government. They all proceed from Necker, they have all had Royer-Collard for preceptor, and Madame de Staël is their muse. The greatest among them — their representative in history, if not the head of their line — is he who at the same time best interprets the political spirit of Madame de Staël in this liberal opposition of the Restoration, — Guizot. A man of the *salon*, a man of science, a speaker of incomparable brilliancy; kindliness itself with his friends, but at first haughty to others; passionate beneath a Calvinist exterior, — he is Necker lifted above himself, the combination of a great minister of public instruction, a diplomat of large scope, an orator without a rival, and one of the first historians of the age. In him Madame de Staël goes on as far as the Revolution of 1830. Then the fallacy of a change of dynasty reappears, and the preconceived analogy with the English Revolution of 1688, which has deceived as many Constitutionalists as the legend of Monk has deceived Royalists. The Cabinet of October, 1832, which united Guizot and the Duc de Broglie, perpetuates the political succession of Madame de Staël; but her reign stops there.

A little later she would not have recognized

herself save among certain opponents, — by the side of Lamartine, for example. It is a turning-point in history. The spirit of 1789 is vanishing. The new whispers that are heard come from other quarters of the Revolution: it is the democracy that is invading; it is socialism that is rising; it is Cæsarism which, like a baleful judgment, follows in the train. It is the era of De Tocqueville's "Democracy in America" (1839), of the trial of the Saint-Simoniens, of anarchist plots, of apologies of the Reign of Terror, of the "Idées Napoléoniennes" of Louis Napoleon (1838), of the return of the ashes of the first Napoleon (1840), of the imperial odes of Victor Hugo (1835–1840), — "La Colonne," "L'Arc de Triomphe," "Mil huit cent onze," "À Laure, Duchesse d'A."

"I guard the treasure of the glories of the Empire;
I have never suffered another to touch it."[1]

The influence of Madame de Staël on the French historical school goes far beyond analogous phases. One may prove it in every line of the learned Droz's history of Louis XVI.; but here, again, the disciple in the truest sense who takes up, enlarges, and finishes the work, is Guizot. It is impossible not to see in the

[1] "Je garde le trésor des gloires de l'Empire;
Je n'ai jamais souffert qu'un osât y toucher."

"Essays on the History of France" (1823) the living impress of the last writings of Madame de Staël. Guizot here brings out with all their first causes and complexities the intermittent crises of liberty in France, which Madame de Staël guessed at dimly, simplified too much, and laid too directly to the charge of the representative government. Guizot's "History of Civilization" (1828–1829) is largely inspired by the "Considerations:" it is civilization conceived of as the constant progress of justice in society and the State; the exterior conditions of human life ameliorated, the inward man rendered more intelligent and more moral. Lastly, the "History of the English Revolution," and the thoughtful discourse which precedes it (1827–1828), a history in which philosophy is mingled with narrative, is built on the plan of the "Considerations." The kinship is revealed even in the incidentals. It is from Madame de Staël that Guizot borrowed the idea of that noble discourse which he entitles "Love in Marriage."

I would ascribe to the same influence, though in less degree, the "Historical Essays" on England by Charles de Rémusat, who, while he made his literary *début* in a dithyrambic article on the "Considerations," is rather more enthusiastic for Madame de Staël's genius than

inspired by it. The fundamental conception of the "Considerations" gives way before the new school of revolutionary historians, — those who aim to isolate the French Revolution in French history, and make of it, not a series of events, but a series of symbols, a quasi-revelation which had its prophets and precursors, but which is without historical precedents. De Tocqueville's work on "The Old Régime" restores Madame de Staël's design to its honored place; it renews the ties between Montesquieu and the past of France. Something analogous happens in the history of the Empire. The marvellous chronicle of M. Thiers (1845) rehabilitates the times stigmatized by the "Ten Years of Exile." Lanfrey, who is otherwise allied to Madame de Staël through Rousseau, undertakes this history, and brings back to the annals of the Napoleonic epoch the spirit of the "Considerations" (1867). With Lanfrey, Madame de Staël attains the limit of her influence upon the historians.

Her literary influence, while very extended, does not reach so far. The book on "Germany" was at its first appearance, and continued for a long time to be, an event. It revealed to the great European public one form of the modern genius. "It was," says Goethe, "like a powerful battering-ram open-

ing a great breach in the Chinese Wall of old prejudices raised between us and France. This book made them wish to know us beyond the Rhine and beyond the Channel, and we have gained by it the means of exercising a lively influence in the far Occident. Let us therefore bless the disturbance caused by her stay among us, and the conflict of national originalities which at that time seemed to us vain and importunate."

It was not alone a taste for German literature, but a taste for all foreign literatures, which this book introduced into France. It is proper to ascribe to it the great work of literary diffusion and translation which reunited the friends and disciples of Madame de Staël, — Fauriel, Prosper de Barante, the translator of Schiller, and Guizot, who made the translation of Shakspeare possible. The influence of German thought upon French thought since 1820 has been considerable. Among those who then received, submitted to, or communicated this influence, there is no one who does not trace it more or less directly to Madame de Staël. The first impulse was hers, and we can discover it even in the men who in other directions are farthest removed from her, — Quinet, for example, and Michelet. We follow it nearer in Nodier; we trace it afar in Hugo,

in his preface to "Cromwell" and in his dramas. It is to be found widely dispersed among the hosts of fantastic ballads, the effusions and reveries of romanticism; the artificial evocations of a Germany of conventionalities which speedily filled French literature, and from literature passed to the studios and concert-rooms. Victor Hugo's "Rhin," De Musset's "Tyrol," "La Coupe et ses Lèvres," — to quote haphazard; then Mignon, Marguerite, and Mephisto, from Delacroix to Gounod, from Johannot and Scheffer to Berlioz, — all proceed in direct line from this book, one of the most *suggestive* that was ever written. We cannot separate from it even the brilliant and fecund school of travellers and critics who follow in the wake and lengthen the furrow as they plough it; as, for example, J. J. Ampère, Gérard de Nerval, and Saint-René Taillandier. I mention only the dead. These however describe a Germany quite different from that of 1810, and while following the path of Madame de Staël, they note the point beyond which her views did not extend.

The "Germany" of Madame de Staël is, they say, a chimera, and they reproach the author with having deceived the French. No one has brought forward this reproach with more spirit than a German, Heinrich Heine, —

a bad German, say his compatriots, who turn their backs upon him in spite of his poetic genius; but certainly a bad Frenchman, and very unfaithful to those among us who believed him to be one of us because he, like Frederick before him, would make sport of us with our own words. His "Germany" is the counterpart and the biting criticism of that of Madame de Staël. "You have," he says to her, "admired the flowers of which you know neither the roots nor the symbolic language." He adds, she heard nothing but the dithyrambs of a romantic company; she observed nothing but the windows of the palace at Weimar through the embroidered curtains, from behind a fan, while listening to the bright wits of the court. She did not distinguish in the literature the rubbish and romantic bric-a-brac; in the customs, the pietistic hypocrisy; in the political world, the corruption and intrigue; in the people, the rancor, lust, and brutality that hide themselves beneath a show of good-nature and servility. She could not see rising from the metaphysical chaos the State-god of Hegel, — a monster, more voracious, more crushing, more destructive to human liberties than the State-man of Louis XIV. and Napoleon. She did not foresee the horrible aridity which the philosophy of Kant

would lay upon the souls of men,—the nihilism of his ideal, the disorder of unbridled reason, the furious invasion of the transcendent *ego*, the social revolution it involves, the philosophical terror which would be its outcome, and beside which the visible terror of Robespierre would be merely a clown's amusement. "You have more to fear," says Heine to the French people, "from Germany delivered than from the Holy Alliance altogether, with all its Croats and Cossacks." Heine wrote these lines in 1839. The Germany that he announced budded in 1840 and burst in 1848.

How blind was Madame de Staël not to have discerned it thirty years earlier! If she was deceived, Heine rectified her, and very vigorously too. But the Germany which Heine, after her and as a contradiction, revealed to France, left more illusions and made more dupes than Madame de Staël's ever ventured to do. Heine, in spite of his reiterated reserves, aroused in many minds the dream of a revolutionary and republican Germany whose first act of faith should be, in recognition of the baptism of the Rights of Man, to offer to France the left bank of the Rhine. Another Germany, one that may be seen between the lines of Stendhal, as observed from a supply-wagon by one of Napoleon's

commissaries, gives the impression of a people made up of "big blond men of indolent habit," pusillanimous, obsequious, smokers, musicians, inn-keepers, and tax-payers, — an impression far more deceptive by reason of its air of personal observation and actual view of things. Madame de Staël foresaw the Germany of 1813; that Germany contained even then the sap of the Germany which awoke in 1840, arose in 1870, and marched to battle singing the popular *Lieder*, "Der Gute Kamerad" and "Die Wacht am Rhein." That Germany was and is, let us not be mistaken, the hidden force which the machine of the Prussian State employs and puts in motion. We were astonished in 1870 to find Blücher's old soldiers mingled with the mystic worshippers of Wagner, the ingenious disciples of Schopenhauer, the learned, the thinkers, the *savants*, poets, artists; and to see, in a war which aroused a whole armed nation, the fierce, the lustful, and the brutal qualities prevail. It is as frivolous and as unjust to reproach Madame de Staël for that, as it would be to dispute the genius of Tolstoi and the beautiful revelations of M. de Vogüé, in case of a Russian invasion of Europe, because we found among them Souvarof's terrible hordes and the fierce conquerors of 1812, as well as

the tormented seekers after the ideal, and pilgrims from a far country.

"Corinne" in turn helped to restore Italy in her own eyes and before the world. It drew aside the veil that had heretofore shrouded this land and nation in mystery, and promulgated throughout Europe a thought which became a political dogma: "The Italians are far more remarkable for what they have been and for what they might be than for what they are at present." Madame de Staël initiated the Italians into romanticism. Silvio Pellico was evidently inspired by her; in fact, she merited the opinion of an Italian who said: "She foresaw the Italy of the future; she was the precursor of a new order of things; she showed herself to be a prophetess, and she anticipated, by apprehension, all that others have said since then without giving her due credit for it."

In French literature we perceive Madame de Staël at the very start of the whole generation that follows. Sainte-Beuve, devoting one of his last articles to her in 1868, said: "She was one of the cults of my youth, and one that I have never abjured. . . . She contributed," he adds, "along with Chateaubriand and after Jean Jacques and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, to arouse in our souls the liking for the marvel-

lous and the infinite." She did this, indeed, but she had no hope of succeeding. She proposed for the inspiration of the poetry of the future: "The enigma of human destiny; the contemplative habit. . . . The solitude of the forests, the limitless horizons, the starry heavens, . . . the eternal and the infinite which fill the soul of Christians." But she did not imagine that French poetry was adapted to this inspiration. "Our versification," she said, "is opposed to any abandonment of enthusiasm." She had not been three years dead ere the poet she hailed appeared before the world and borrowed from her not only inspiration but even the very title of one of his poems, — "Les Receuillements."

Lamartine fulfilled Madame de Staël's ideas in poetry as Guizot did in history. In 1811 he followed the footsteps of Corinne and Nelvil through Italy. He had devoured the works on "Germany" and "The Passions." He execrated the Empire, he cursed Napoleon as "the infernal genius raised up to degrade a whole generation and to uproot the entire national enthusiasm!" Madame de Staël was his liberator. "A sublime judge, tender and large-hearted; a woman, adorable and compassionate." He acknowledges her in one of his first Meditations, dated 1820, —

"But my soul, O Coppet, flies back to thy shores!"[1]

He pays her, in a certain way, the homage of his work in his discourse on the "Destinées de la Poésie" in 1834. Take all his verses on Italy, the Meditations on the Coliseum, on humanity, on immortality; read the apostrophes in the "Pèlerinage d'Harold," and you will find there, put into rhyme and harmony by the genius of the musician, all the songful strains of Corinne and Nelvil. The heroine of "Jocelyn" is a daughter of Delphine, more exalted and ardent; we recognize these cries of the abandoned Dido whose echoes still haunt Coppet: —

"Her thrilling voice re-echoed through the grotto's sounding aisles:
'Jocelyn! Jocelyn!
Oh, come, restore me to your open arms, before their eyes,
To that dear refuge where my heart the universe defies.'"[2]

The formidable invective upon Bonaparte seems to leap like a latent flame from the work on "Considerations," — "He regards a human

[1] "Mais mon âme, ô Coppet, s'envole vers tes rives!"

[2] "Sa voix d'airain vibrait dans la grotte ébranlée:
'Jocelyn! Jocelyn!
Viens me rendre à leurs yeux, dans tes bras entr'ouverts,
Cet asile où mon cœur braverait l'Univers.'"

being as a fact or thing, but not as a fellow-creature. He hates no more than he loves. His strength of will consists in the imperturbable calculation of his egotism. . . . No spark of enthusiasm mingled with his desire to astound the human race. . . ."

Throw this thought into the soul of the poet, and you have it pictured in magnificent coloring: —

" Without joy thou didst ascend, without murmur thou didst fail;
Nothing human beat beneath thine impervious coat of mail:
Without hate as without love, thou livedst only in the mind;
Like the lordly eagle reigning in the heavens solitary
Thou surveyedst the earth beneath thee but to gauge an adversary,
And in thy claws another prey to find.[1]

Madame de Staël would have applauded Lamartine's discourses of 1840. She would have disavowed the " History of the Girondists." I imagine that there were many romances and novels which had their origin in her

[1] " Tu grandis sans plaisir, tu tombas sans murmure,
Rien d'humain ne battait sous ton épaisse armure:
Sans haine et sans amour, tu vivais pour penser;
Comme l'aigle régnant dans un ciel solitaire,
Tu n'avais qu'un regard pour mesurer la terre,
Et des serres pour l'embrasser."

own, — those by women particularly. In the work and life of many women who have apparently walked in her footsteps, there is an element of moral insubordination and revolt, a basis of restless discontent, a flavor of adventure from over the borders of Bohemia, which would have shocked and clashed with her own womanly good sense and social experience. Doubtless "Mauprat" would have delighted her. She would have recognized in Lélia and Consuelo Corinne's own sisters. But I doubt that she would have approved of Indiana and Valentine, or would have liked the author even had she admired her. I fancy that she would have liked Daniel Stern better, and above all would have sympathized with him, while admiring him less. Delphine Gay with her artificiality and her career of counterfeit and plagiarism, would have been intolerable to her. Some of Balzac's women, as Camille Maupin and Madame de Mortsauf, would have touched her. She would have enjoyed the "Memoirs of a Young Married Couple," and would have thought that Louise de Chaulieu understood *le grand amour* when she wrote to her friend: "Oh! how I should have loved Napoleon, and how I should have made him feel, had he loved me, that he was at my mercy!"

Balzac derived inspiration from Madame de

Staël's chronicles, and made use of her works, especially of "The Passions," in devising the conversations of his refined and ardent lovers in high life. In his "Human Comedy," he gave no place to Corinne, however; he thought her too exceptional. "After her," he said, "there would be no place in this cycle for a Sappho." He does not allow her to appear in his microcosm, save by a vision and an allusion, like Napoleon, to vivify the drama. It was in the same way, during her sojourn near Vendôme in 1810, at the critical moment of the appearance of her "Germany," that Madame de Staël met Louis Lambert in rags, who read Swedenborg to her. She became interested in his singular genius, paid his tuition at the college of Vendôme from 1811 to 1814 for the sake of snatching him from the Church and the Emperor; then she disappeared, and never thought of him again.

Even the style of Madame de Staël's romances, the mingling of passions and characters with philosophy, travels, studies in politics, art, and history, declines soon after her day. "La Chartreuse de Parme" (1839) deals as formidable a blow to "Corinne" in this respect as did Heinrich Heine to the book on "Germany." This style, although very lofty, seemed neglected with us until the accomplished author

of "Prince Vital," "Grand Œuvre," and the "Romance of a Virtuous Woman," suddenly revived it and brought it into favor, bringing back also to our literature the spirit of Madame de Staël through the same channels which at the same time were traversed by Lanfrey.

There has been a prodigious amount of writing on Madame de Staël. Of the many authors I will mention here but three as most important, and they will dispense with the necessity of reading any others: Madame Necker de Saussure, who collected the traditions and painted the family portrait; Lady Blennerhasset, who gathered up all the scattered souvenirs and built a large monument of the clever mosaic; Sainte-Beuve, who ransacked everything, learned everything, divined the rest, and marvellously reconstituted the whole. While Madame de Staël figures in Balzac merely in name, as an episodic personage, she is the heroine and the chief *coryphée* of Sainte-Beuve's Monday-Chats, that other and superior Human Comedy. Sainte-Beuve, of all who have studied Madame de Staël, is the most profound and the most searching; he has almost colored his work with the hue of a final judgment, and this judgment is an homage of admiration and sympathy. As the age has advanced, Madame de Staël has been raised

up and isolated from among her contemporaries, — so much so that to-day, seventy-three years after her death, we are paying her more attention than she received when she died in Paris. And it is just.

What she has left behind her goes to manifest especially her oratorical faculties, — her improvisation and her copious and persuasive eloquence. She wrote on literature and politics; but she lacked, in order to become a political woman, the reason and *les entrailles d'Etat* which made Elizabeth, Catherine II., and Maria Theresa; and, in order to stand in the front rank of women writers, the style which made Madame de Sévigné and George Sand. The errors which one may lay hold on in her life are not intrinsically her own; they are those of her times and her position, — those of the intoxication of the last years of Louis XVI., and of the bewilderment of the awakening of life under the Directory. She developed, on the contrary, more than any person of her day, the best qualities of her times, — sympathy and confidence in the progress of the human spirit, and faith in liberty.

Let rhetoricians criticise the defects of her style; let the parsimonious and the egotists blame her prodigality; politicians, her chimeras; the meditative, her love of the world;

the worldly, her cultivation of letters; the wise, her abandonment to passion; the clever, her sensationalism: but go to the botton and you will find in her life only the desire to give and to obtain happiness, the need of loving and of being loved; in her politics, only the sentiment of justice; in her literature, only the aspiration after the ideal, and throughout all, sincerity. She fought against her heart, her temperament, even her renown; and this renown, which fell to her above measure, was made up of more mourning than it ever brought her of joy.

Madame de Staël left some words which are still salutary, and some great lessons which are always profitable. Pity for human misery is the perpetual exhortation of her work; the sentiment of the dignity of man, of his right to independence, of his true greatness founded on his moral elevation, is the inspiration; the worship of justice and the love of liberty are the constant monitors and the conclusion. It is the daily bread of souls; it is not enough that they think themselves surfeited by it, they must revive the appetite for it. Madame de Staël was, in her day, compassionate to the victims, and comforting to the disheartened; her work, which is virile, is wholesome to our contemporaries. We still feel a breath of it

descending from the heights, and sweeping over the lower thoughts and the subtle ferments which disquiet life.

Planted between two great ages, she seems the last flower of that which is about to close and the first seed of that which is to begin. A beautiful genius rather than an artist in literature and history, a great witness rather than an actor in the events of her times, she deserves to live because she represents one of the best epochs of the French spirit.

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